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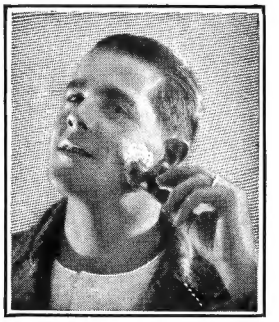

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Beginning

IN THE YEAR 2000*

A Novel in Three Parts

By ARTHUR O. FRIEL

CHAPTER I

THE SKY RIDER

HIGH over a motionless gray green sea darted a human dragon fly.

Behind it, ranging in an endless column from north to south, bulked titanic mountains—some capped with white, others gaunt and naked, all obscured in their lower reaches by crawling clouds or blurring fogs. Before it stretched the limitless expanse of dull green, growing more and more indistinct, more and more gray with heat mist, until it vanished into the vagueness where earth ended and sky began.

Below it, from time to time, a glint of light flickered and died; a fleeting reflection from river or lake or lagoon—from true water, dotting that strange ocean which seemed to be water but was not. Above it arched the tremendous blue dome of the universe, wherein blazed a dazzling sun. In all that vast scene was visible no moving thing save the tiny insect speeding through space.

Lost in the immensity seemed that courier of the air. But, if it was indeed

*This is an Off-the-Trail Story.

YOU will remember those fine stories of the Upper Amazon "Tiger River" and "The King of No Man's Land", in which were related the remarkable experiences of the American adventurers, McKay and Knowlton, Ryan and Rand; and how Rand and the Spaniard José Martinez established a new kingdom in the midst of the jungle.

And now, almost a century later, another McKay, grandson of the old, and air hero of a new and terrible World War, flies southward to meet with still more exciting adventures in the lost depths of that jungle realm.

lost, it was traveling with singular directness and surprising velocity. Not by a hair's breadth did it deviate from its course southeastward. Not by a half note did it alter the low droning tone—half hum, half whistle—betokening its terrific speed. Though the dragon fly itself was a senseless, eyeless creature, endowed only with supernatural power of flight, the human brain controlling it apparently was either absolutely sure of its objective or utterly nonchalant as to where and how the traverse might end. Onward, ever onward, it shot through the whimpering air, while behind it the hulking Andes steadily shrank into the distance and blurred into the mists.

The face of the man lounging deep in the insect's hollow back was as unchanging as the song of his steed. Behind his goggles his gray eyes moved casually from the instrument board to the monotonous reaches ahead, then back again. His strong mouth lay in repose, betraying no quickening of interest in anything about him, curving in no smile born of amusing fancies. His expression, his languid attitude, were those of a man

somewhat bored by life and journeying in quest of something new.

At length, however, he began to manifest closer attention to his immediate and distant surroundings. His gaze moved back and forth between a couple of dials—the one measuring time, the other speed. Lazily he straightened from his relaxed posture and looked over the side, while the nose of the dragon fly tilted slightly downward and its speed note sank to a lower tone. Gradually the tree ocean below rose nearer; and presently, amid the dull green, appeared an irregular silvery streak. It was a jungle bound river, running southeastward. Along this marker the flier cruised for a time, steadily studying it. Then he gave a satisfied murmur and let his gaze go roving off to the left.

"That's the Rio Pastasa, without a doubt," he declared. "So far, so good. And now, unless they've moved this country around since the old man left it, the forbidden city of the land of nowhere ought to be over yonder. Let's go and see, little straddle bug."

OBEDIENT to his control, the dragon fly swung more to the east, still planing nearer to the greenery. Its song sank another note, and the whistle of the air diminished. Cruising at easy speed, it drifted along for a time in a meandering course, while its master searched the distance.

"The land of nowhere," he mused, a little smile now quirking his lips, "or, as grandpop used to call it, No Man's Land. Where once an outlaw king made war on the head hunters; and where, according to those Ecuadoreans back yonder, a great double headed bogeyman now gobbles all comers. What d'you suppose he is, little straddle bug? A cyclops, or a sphinx, or a mere whangdoddle?"

A lazy chuckle followed. With the same nonchalance he contemplated the hazy vista, turning the head of his mount now this way, now that, in serpentine swings along the airway. The dragon fly had ceased to descend and was flitting along at a height of about a thousand feet.

Out of the haze began to loom a rambling range of hills, rising at the northward into sizable mountains, decreasing at the south until they merged into the swamplands. As they approached and took on form the flier's eyes began to glow behind their panes.

"The Cordillera de Pastasa!" he exclaimed. "That's it. Everything tallies thus far. Now the city ought to be—let's see—a bit to the north, perhaps? Well, little *caballito*, we'll ride awhile longer just as we are. Then we'll scout along the ridge. A trifle more zip, if you please."

The speed song mounted again. At the same time the dragon fly's nose lifted, and its slender body scaled upward on a long slant. At a height of perhaps a mile it once more flew at a level, well above the crests of the rapidly approaching cordillera.

The drowsy expression of the rider now had vanished. So, too, had his lolling relaxation of posture. He sat straight, alert, conning the rugged country ahead with eager interest. As he shot across the divide he once more checked the velocity of his racer, turning it, at the same time, southward. In a long wavy swing he reconnoitered the humps and hollows—both alike jungle clad—and returned to the crossing point.

"Nothing there," he muttered. "Must be up at the north."

And he began circling northward.

NOW THE dragon fly idled. Its flying song sank to a gentle murmur as, with consummate ease, it drifted in flat loops along the range. The crests, steadily mounting, became more rugged and less thickly topped with timber. Presently, on one of these, the sky rider saw something which caused him to turn short and hover a few minutes, revolving in a tiny circle. On the topmost knob of a rocky summit rose a slender tower. At the base of the spire stood a rectangular hut. Beside the hut several antlike figures were gazing fixedly upward.

As the airman continued to circle, he glimpsed a movement on the tower itself.

Another ant was rapidly working at something. A fleeting glint of light showed, like a sunbeam glancing off a bright surface. It was not repeated. But, from another peak, miles to the northward, flashed a dazzling white light, as if in response. For a second it blazed; then it was gone.

The tower ant still worked, moving with short, quick jerks. The dragon fly tilted downward and began descending in spirals. Up rose the tower, the hut, the mountain top. Now the tower ant was a man, light skinned, black haired, bending and straightening beside something which threw off flickering glimmers of white lightning.

Suddenly he glanced upward and swung his instrument over. Into the dropping airman's eyes shot a searing white flame. Blinded, he jerked back his head. Instinctively he twitched the nose of his racer up and away. Mingling with the high hum of his new speed sounded several popping noises below and thin whines close beside him.

For several seconds he fought to master the aching white blindness that had blotted out everything. Then his sight cleared sufficiently to enable him to get his bearings. He was whirring skyward and westward. With an angry mutter he swerved to the northeast and straightened out once more in the air. After a minute or so, still blinking and scowling from eye strain, he gave a short, hard chuckle.

"Helio," he remarked. "The old fashioned heliograph. And, by Judas, a nasty thing to face with your eyes wide open! Feels as if it had drilled a hole out through the back of my skull. Well, my little man on the tower, I thank you for your kind attention; I wondered what you were playing with, and you certainly showed me. Thanks also for the rifle salute, you fellows down below. You shaved me infernally close, but I'm still here, and now I've a slightly better notion of what may be ahead. So all's well."

Crest after crest slid past at his right and dwindled behind. Now and then a tower appeared. The flier did no more hovering, no more weaving around the heights. He now was following the line of lookouts toward the point, as yet invisible, to which their message was being relayed. The first tower had flashed its news to the northward. Somewhere at the north, therefore, must lie the forbidden city.

"HELIOGRAPHS and rifles," he mused. "A trifle out of date, but by no means primitive. Let's see, grandfather said these fellows used rifles back in 1925; but he never mentioned the helio—said they signaled by drum beats. They've progressed a bit. Wonder what other innovations they've adopted since he left them."

Far off to the northward winked a new heliographic ray, gone almost as soon as seen. On the flyer's face grew a reckless smile.

"Still talking about me, eh?" he mocked. "Very well. Get out the band and line up the reception committee. Your unexpected guest will presently be among you."

The whistle of the severed air mounted to a scream. The mountains rushed past in a formless line. Crouching low out of the wind, the master of the dragon fly now was hurling himself onward with tremendous velocity. Again at the north—not far ahead now—blazed and died a helio, acknowledging receipt of the warning shot along the crests. Squinting ahead, the unbidden visitor watched for the next station to take up the relay, and saw none.

All at once he checked, veered and went into a wide elliptical swing. The powerful hum of his driving force dwindled to virtual silence; the air scream diminished to a whistle, the whistle to a whine, the whine to a whisper. His head was over the side again. For a minute or two he scanned the scene below him. Then—

"Aha! There she is!" he exclaimed. "The forbidden city!"

Half a mile down, and perhaps two miles to the southward, lay a great green

and gray rimmed bowl packed with yellowish rectangles; an upland depression, encircled by rolling stony heights, wherein nestled countless houses. Near its center seemed to be a small mesa, also capped with house roofs. So snugly packed into its container was the jungle city that the speeding sky rider had shot over it without seeing it; and, but for the prompting of some intuition based on the absence of further sun signals, he might still have been whizzing on and away.

NOW, DRIFTING, he sank at an easy slant. After a comprehensive survey of the settlement he scanned the country outside the rock wall. There, too, were visible the yellowish roofs; but these were much more scattered, and around them were many open spaces wherein grew well ordered crops. The observer turned his gaze from these farm lands back to the city proper, which now was beginning to slide under him.

"It's big," he muttered, "bigger even than the Ecuadoreans said. Judging from the reception I met back yonder, it may also be fully as hostile to strangers as reports have indicated. Well, we'll see. Now, grandfather said the royal palace was on that central rock, and it looks as if that were still the case. Seems to be a sort of plaza there, too. So that's where we'll land—maybe."

Slowly spiraling, he glided down toward the short mesa. The top of that plateau was lined by a hollow square of houses, and at first many little human figures were visible outside, standing and staring upward. Then, all at once, as if in response to some command, those figures rushed into the houses and were gone. Only blank roofs and an empty plaza lay there under the sun.

The flyer's eyes narrowed. The sudden concerted disappearance seemed ominous. He swerved out of his spiral, darting aside with abrupt acceleration, then ascending at a stiff, though short, grade. Hardly had he thus jerked away when—*Crash!*

A heavy report boomed. A heavy missile rocketed past with prolonged growl. Dipping sharply, the airman beheld a dark roll of smoke crawling away from a metal cylinder which projected from a black opening in a roof.

"The devil! That was true too!" he ejaculated. "An anti-aircraft gun! And infernally well aimed."

Hawk eyed, he searched the roofs for another muzzle. None showed. The one that had just fired on him seemed to be moving a little, but of this he could not be sure; for he now was weaving an erratic course, and his own movements somewhat confused his vision. A moment later, however, it became unmistakably evident that the gun was following him.

Flame and smoke vomited from it. Another explosion roared.

The dragon fly lurched headlong. Its nose dropped. A swift dart downward—it flopped on its back. Struggling, it righted itself. Then, gyrating like a crippled bird trying to escape its doom, it wheeled down—down—down. With a last short upward lunge it spun halfway around, touched ground in the midst of the mesa, and was still.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD-TIMER

THE SKY rider stood up. With swift movements he doffed flying coat, headgear and goggles, revealing a broad shouldered frame and an eagle featured countenance, crowned by unruly black hair. His jaw now was set, his lips compressed, his eyes narrowed. Yet on those tight lips rested a thin smile, and far back in the gray eyes twinkled a reckless—though dangerous—light. His long fingered right hand hovered beside a belt whence hung a flat holster; but he did not draw the weapon pouched at his hip. Stooping a little, he poised like a hawk ready to pounce, yet waiting.

Armed men were rushing at him; men who had erupted from the fortlike structure of adobe which had fired on him and who, bearing rifles or long machetes gleaming in the sun, were sprinting like wolves converging on a doomed victim.

Their charge was the more sinister for its silence. Not one yell of exultation broke from their throats; the only noise was the drum of feet. Hard mouthed, hard eyed, they closed into a menacing mass around the inert dragon fly. Still the man above them stood motionless.

For a few seconds he scanned his captors, swiftly noting their features and physiques—their broad faces, strong jaws, straight eyes and symmetrical bodies. All were black haired and slightly Indian of lineament; yet all were white men, so far as their sun tanned skins indicated—men of a swarthy type, but still white. Their garments, too, were those of civilization—loose shirts and trousers of a uniform brownish shade. All were barefooted and bareheaded.

While he glanced them over, they in turn scrutinized him; and, as his attitude and expression registered on their minds, a slightly puzzled look grew on their faces. Obviously, they had expected him to start a desperate fight for life, a fight which they were very ready to finish. His mocking gaze, his fearless poise, his inscrutable smile nonplussed them. For the time there was no sound save that of hoarse breathing.

"*Buenos dias, amigos,*" then drawled the unwelcome visitor. "Good morning, friends."

No answer. The scowling faces contracted a little more. The searching brown eyes focused more sharply on the satiric gray ones. Rifles moved uncertainly. A few of the machetes wavered.

"*No habla español?*" he quizzed. "You do not speak Spanish?"

"*Si.* We speak it," growled a voice.

A tall man bearing on his right shoulder a maroon tab—evidently a mark of military rank—came elbowing his way authoritatively through the press. His right fist gripped a long revolver, which he kept raised, though not aimed, as he advanced. Reaching the front, he continued, harshly—

"Who are you?"

"Who am I?" mocked the other. "Who do you suppose rides the *caballito del diablo**? Who but *El Diablo* himself? I am the Devil, and I come to visit your king."

THE MEN stared. On some of the faces dawned a flicker of amusement. Then the stony visaged wearer of the maroon badge grunted scornfully.

"Huh! A tale for babes!" he rumbled. "We have seen such *caballitos* before. We have smashed them."

"You have not smashed this one. It may be hurt, but it is still ready to bite. If I speak the word, it will turn and tear you to nothing, as the small *caballito* tears little flies. Do not be too bold, my friend."

"Huh!" jeered the soldier. But his glance sneaked uneasily toward the sinister propeller blades. The others, likewise eying the long creature with some misgiving, involuntarily pressed back a little.

"I will see your king," repeated the rider. "Where is he?"

A pause. He of the maroon tab gave the man above him a searching stare. As his lips slowly opened, a voice from farther back forestalled his reply.

"*Qué dice?*" it called. "What does he say?"

It was a thin old voice, and it came from a thin old man. The flyer saw him, some distance away, leaning on a stick; a stooped figure, yet not a short one; an ancient, shriveled hatchet face of a man, but one whose tones were sharp and penetrating. The voice evidently was familiar to the revolver carrier, for he answered without turning his head—

"He says he is El Diablo and he comes to see the king."

Another pause. Then a cackle from the ancient.

"El Diablo? Then bring him to the king! We shall see which is the worse devil!"

A hiss of indrawn breath, an uneasy turning of heads, was the response of all but the red shouldered man. He growled—

---

*—the devil's little horse—the Spanish name of the dragon fly.

"Hold your tongue, Cononaco, lest it be torn from you!"

The old man cackled again.

"The devil comes to meet the devil! *Bueno!*"

He began to hobble forward. The close packed men before him opened a lane. The others, though still watching the self styled El Diablo with half an eye, cast hurried glances backward as if dreading some presence not visible to the master of the dragon fly. The latter, noting their disquietude, smiled slightly as he watched the oldster approach.

"You've committed *lèse majesté*, Cononaco, if I'm not mistaken," he thought, "and it's not a safe amusement, apparently. And you don't care if it isn't. I think I'm going to like you, old fellow."

OLD CONONACO, limping briskly, advanced at good speed. His face, seamed with myriad lines of age, still bore a sardonic grin, and he ignored the sour look which the maroon marked fellow slid sidewise at him. On reaching the side of the plane, however, he suddenly lost his mirthful grimace. His eyes opened wider and stared with fixed intensity at the stranger.

A silence fell. A growing tenseness seemed to emanate from Cononaco and permeate the surrounding array. His jaw dropped. For a good half minute he gaped upward, while the young man in the cockpit steadily met his stare. Around them not even a breath was audible.

The old man's mouth slowly closed, and on his wrinkled visage grew a joyous light. His lips waggled soundlessly. Then, in a hushed tone, he hoarsely muttered—

"Oom Keh!"

The stranger's brows drew together in a puzzled frown. He said nothing. Cononaco nodded several time, seeming to gloat on a great discovery. In the same tone he asked—

"What is your name?"

"McKay."

"Oom Keh!" the old man echoed in triumph. "Oom Keh! From what place do you come, Oom Keh?"

"North America. United States—"

"Norte Amerikaa! *Es verdad!* It is true! It is the same! Oom Keh returns to the White Ones! Oom Keh returns to the White Ones!"

His bent frame had straightened so that he stood almost erect. His sharp old eyes shone. Turning suddenly, he poured a shrill, rapid speech into the ears of the hostile crew, waving his staff by way of emphasis. The words were unintelligible to McKay, but their sense speedily became clear; for upon the countenances upturned to him came first astonishment, then friendliness, and the weapons sank and disappeared. McKay in turn relaxed from his ready attitude, and his thumbs rose a little and hooked over his belt.

With a final sentence in which "Oom Keh" was repeated for the twentieth time, the old man swung himself back to face McKay. The latter, reading anew the lines of extreme age on his face, asked:

"You knew my grandfather, did you, Cononaco?"

"*Sí!*"

The hairless pate nodded vehemently.

"You are Oom Keh, the son of Oom Keh, the son of Oom Keh. Well did Cononaco know Oom Keh, the friend of the great king Ho Seh. A mighty man, and hard! He lives no more?"

"No more. And his friend, the great king José?"

"Ho Seh is dead," mourned the ancient. "And all the others of his time. All but old Cononaco, the cripple. And Cononaco has mourned because he has lived so long. All are gone—all the mighty ones—and an evil day is on the White Ones. But now Cononaco is glad; he has lived to see Oom Keh born again. Come down from your horse of the devil and walk with Cononaco, and you shall see—what you shall see."

"Without doubt. And shall I see the great two headed demon who devours men?"

A QUEER look came into the puckered visage—astonishment, wonder, displeasure, all at once, and with them a keen stare. The other faces mirrored the surprise and a touch of anger, coupled with perplexity.

"Oom Keh speaks unwisely and must have heard a twisted tale," reproved Cononaco. "It is not good to speak such words before all men. Later, perhaps—But now let Oom Keh come down and have no fear. Oom Keh shall walk safely."

"Oom Keh has no fear," McKay responded calmly. "No fear of man or of demon."

"*Si*. If he had fear he would not be Oom Keh." The oldster was obviously pleased by the retort. "Come down."

McKay came down. Swinging his long legs over the side, he slid to the ground. There, straightening to full height, he stretched himself, smiling into the faces confronting him. Cononaco, viewing his stalwart proportions, emitted another cackle.

"Oom Keh himself! The mighty one! Yet, Oom Keh, you are not the hard Oom Keh of the other time. His face never changed. You smile. You move with laziness—"

McKay wheeled. A hand had clutched at his belt. The maroon badged man, spying the pendant pistol, was bent on disarming the intruder. His left fist now was yanking at the broad strap.

"Hands off!" snapped McKay, gripping the other's wrist.

With a sour grunt, the man loosed his hold. But a scowl darkened his brow, and his revolver rose into line with the visitor's heart.

"Take off the belt!" he growled.

"No!"

McKay's refusal was curt and cold. His easy good humor had vanished and his look was bleak. The two glowered at each other.

"Off!" The revolver jabbed forward, punching hard into the ribs.

The counterpunch came with such speed that nobody, not even the aggressor, saw it start. McKay stepped back, aside, and in again in one bewildering motion. A sharp crack split the air. The native lurched violently sidewise and collapsed, the revolver dropping from his nerveless fingers. With one stride McKay planted a foot on the weapon. Bare fisted, he fronted the rest.

At the blow and the fall, the others instinctively surged a little forward, faces darkening and weapons rising again. But then Cononaco barked shrilly and they halted. A short, snappish sentence from the old man, and they drew back. Cononaco turned, cast a glance at the senseless huddle, another at McKay's fists, and cackled once more.

"He-he-he-he! Cononaco was wrong, Oom Keh. You are truly Oom Keh—the hard—the quick—the strong. See what has come to Yanga, the bold one! He-he-he! Let him lie and sleep while Oom Keh and Cononaco walk. Come, Oom Keh. Yonder is a thing upon which your eyes should rest."

GIVING the others a warning scowl, he began limping off. McKay, after an impartial glare around, stooped and picked up the revolver. Rising, he snapped:

"Let no man touch my *caballito!* He who does will wish he had not."

None answered. Striding after Cononaco, he handed him the captured gun.

"This is the arm of a man, not of a child," he asserted. "So Oom Keh gives it to a man."

Cononaco's eyes glowed at the broad compliment, but he made no reply. Negligently carrying the weapon in one hand, plying his stick with the other, he stumped along as if momentarily buried in thought. His protégé, dropping behind a little, glanced down at the crippled leg. Unlike the younger men, the ancient wore only short breeches, and the maimed limb was plainly visible. On its withered calf was a frightful scar; the tendons were short, drawing up the heel so far that only the toes touched earth. On the bare torso above, too, were the traces of other old wounds—many of them.

It was apparent that Cononaco had once been a formidable warrior. McKay, scanning the mute testimony of his bygone prowess, marveled that a man so cut up could have lived to so great an age, at least ninety years.

Behind the veteran and the visitor sounded a rustle of moving feet. The American, looking back, found the crowd following them. The momentary menace had faded again from their faces, and now they trailed in stolid silence, actuated merely by curiosity as to the next development. The fallen Yanga had been callously left as he lay, to recover his senses as best he might.

Cononaco slowed, moving his head toward a square stone just beyond. Aggressive, isolated, that block stood like a monument; but to what, or to whom, was not at first apparent, for it seemed to bear no inscription or ornament. Moving past its nearer faces, however, the old man stopped, pointing in Indian fashion by a lift of his chin. On the farther side was something which brought a quick light to the face of the stranger.

Bolted firmly to the stone were two bronze plates, one oval, one square. From the oval looked forth a face sculptured in demi-relief—a bold, alert, resolute face of lean Spanish lineaments and strong character, questing the distances with steady gaze. The expression was that of inflexible purpose tempered with humanity. Below, within the square, were words which, coupled with the Spanish face, seemed at first incongruous, then cryptic; for they were English words; and, unlike all orthodox inscriptions, they gave no clue to the identity of the man.

I FOUND A RUIN
AND I MADE
A HOME

SUCH were the words; a strange epitaph to one whose every feature was that of a fighter. Yet McKay evidently understood.

"José Martinez!" he exclaimed. "One of my grandfathers had these plates made and sent them to him! This is José!"

"Ho Seh," echoed Cononaco. "Ho Seh the mighty one. He is gone." He moved his head dolefully. "And the old Oom Keh is gone."

"Yes," nodded McKay, still studying the bronze face. "But the young Oom Keh is here. And the words of José live after him. And the kingdom he made lives—"

"It dies!"

So sharp, so bitter was the contradiction that McKay started.

"But what—" began McKay.

"It dies," repeated the veteran. "The words of Ho Seh are dead. Cononaco knows those words—and they are dead. And the kingdom of the White Ones dies on its feet. Its head is dead now. So dead that it rots!"

His voice rasped, his breath whistled, his whole battle scarred person seemed to exude sudden venom. The younger man stared.

These were harsh words indeed for an old soldier to speak of his ruler—harsh and rash, almost suicidal. McKay wondered whether the veteran might not be mentally unbalanced. Perhaps the sharp old eyes detected this thought, for, after drawing his visage into a tight knot, Cononaco became himself again.

"Oom Keh comes to see the king," he said in a dry tone. "Come now and see him. Visit the great Vicente—the Jivero bastard who rules the White Ones of Ho Seh."

"Jivero?" gasped McKay. "The Jiveros are head hunters!"

Cononaco smiled a wickedly mirthless smile. Leaning on his cane, clutching the revolver in a tense, skinny hand, he turned about and began limping back toward the plane.

McKay's gaze slid again to the sculptured face of the first king of the White Ones; roved over the unreadable visages of the men near at hand; dwelt on the old-timer's receding back. Then the reckless light dawned again under his black brows, and he lounged forward. But, as he walked, he casually loosened the pistol in its sheath.

CHAPTER III

THE PURPLE SNAKE

FOR A few halting paces Cononaco stumped along with smoldering gaze fixed on the ground; heading toward the farther end of the plaza—where stood a house broader than the others—but, for the moment, giving attention to nothing but his acidulous thoughts. McKay, on the other hand, was using his eyes as he walked; and, towering over the White Ones by nearly a head, he noted something which brought a frown to his brow and abrupt acceleration to his stride. Contemptuous of his recent command, somebody was climbing up into his plane.

"Say, you!" he roared. "Get out of that!"

The climber paused, one leg over the edge, and peered toward him. Subconsciously the wrathful owner noted that the intruder was clad, not in the brownish uniform common to the men of the mesa, but in glowing purple. Every one else evidently observed the same thing, and recked more of it than the Northerner; for through the hitherto voiceless escort ran a subdued grunt. Cononaco, looking up quickly, made an odd noise and involuntarily checked himself.

Then the purple figure calmly resumed its movements, drew its leg over and was inside the cockpit. McKay's face darkened still more. Shouldering aside intervening men, he strode purposefully forward.

"Have care, Oom Keh!" warned Cononaco, speaking low. "Snakes bite. That one is the king."

For an instant McKay slowed. Then, determining to maintain the bold front which thus far had served so well, he pushed on at the same gait. The scowl died from his forehead, however, and his expression became unreadable; his hands, too, swung carelessly, not too near his holster. Straight to the machine he marched, walking now alone; for the self appointed escort had almost stopped, and lame Cononaco was quickly outdistanced.

Beside the plane stood a small knot of men whose attitudes and garments showed them at a glance to be satellites of the king. Each was clad in white, with a broad purple sash slung diagonally from the right shoulder across the chest; and each held himself with the hauteur of a grandee. As McKay approached the men moved into a crescent formation, blocking him from their master. The latter, standing above, looked down with sardonic gaze.

Over all of them the Northerner's gaze passed. All, he saw, were undubitably Spanish of feature, even the king, Vicente, whom the old cripple had called Jivero and whom McKay had, therefore, expected to find brownish of skin and aboriginal of feature. After one straight look at the ruler of the White Ones the newcomer decided that the epithet had been merely a slander prompted by senile spite.

TALL, wiry, lean cheeked, thin mouthed, black eyed, black mustached, cynical — typically Castilian, seemed King Vicente at first sight. On his lips rested a slight smile, as if the sky rider were merely an amusing insect. That smile nettled McKay a little. So did the insolent regard of the purple sashed jungle aristocrats. But he kept his own face expressionless until one of those nabobs spoke to him.

"Halt there, dog!"

The slurring command came from a pig cheeked man whose right hand caressed the hilt of a poniard at his waist. McKay's lids contracted and his eyes glinted. With a cold stare at the speaker he took two more strides. Then, just out of reach, he stopped and surveyed the other from top to toe. The hand holding the poniard twitched, but did not rise. McKay grunted contemptuously, then spoke to the man in purple.

"You are King Vicente, whose ancestor was King José, formerly José Martinez of Peru?"

Vicente, whose smile had not altered, nodded languidly.

"You have heard of McKay and

Knowlton, the friends of King José?"

Vicente nodded again. His gaze sharpened.

"I am their grandson, and I come to visit the land of the White Ones."

The black eyes regarding him sharpened still more. There was a pause. When Vicente replied, the Northerner experienced a slight shock of surprise; for, though McKay had spoken in Spanish, the answer was in English.

"You come—from where?"

The tone was soft, purring, reminding McKay of a cat.

"From the United States."

"Ah," purred Vicente. "And your United States are at the west of here?"

The question was voiced so innocently that the visitor barely repressed a smile.

"No. Far to the north."

"Ah. But you fly here from the west. How is that?"

"Why, I flew here from Quito."

"Yes. From Quito. That is Ecuador—that Quito. You fly here from Ecuador. Yesss!"

Vicente still smiled. Into his tone, however, had crept a sinister sibilance. It now was not catty, but snaky. And it held an undernote which caused McKay's mouth to tighten, a hint of menace.

"Certainly I flew from Quito," he bruskly retorted. "I had to hop off from somewhere this morning, and Quito's the only civilized place around here."

Vicente stiffened. His smile became unpleasant, and his voice sharp edged.

"The only civilized place, yes? I regret that you find *this* place so uncivilized. We dislike to appear barbarous in the eyes of the great McKay, from the United States—*and* Ecuador."

McKAY bit his tongue. The man maddened him. Not only had he twisted the visitor's carelessly phrased statement into an affront to himself, but his words were a deliberate sneer. Without actually saying so, in fact, he was calling McKay a liar, a sneak and a spy. The Northerner glared. But he held his voice steady as he countered:

"That wasn't what I meant, and you know it. However, that's not the point. Evidently you don't believe that I'm McKay. It happens that I have proof. Here it is."

From an inner pocket he extracted several papers. Among these he selected a dark folder which he opened up into a sheet four times as large.

"Passport," he laconically continued. "Official permission to enter all countries of the world. Executed a month ago. I visited the capitals of all the Central American countries on my way down; also Bogotá and Quito. Look it over. Photograph and everything."

He moved a little forward; stopped abruptly. The solid wall of purple festooned men still blocked him. The one who had called him "dog" half drew his poniard.

"Hand me the paper, Heberto," murmured King Vicente.

One of them extended an imperious hand. The line remained solid.

"Since you're afraid to take it from me yourself," jarred McKay, his temper slipping, "you needn't look at it! I have other proofs also, but—"

A movement at his left drew his head sharply aside for an instant. The others, too, glanced in that direction—even Vicente, whose cheeks were flushing angrily at the charge of cowardice. The movement was that of the man Yanga, who, ever since his knockout, had lain untended on the ground. Now he was lurching up, staring blankly around. As his gaze met that of McKay his visage seemed to bloat. He looked about him for his revolver. Failing to find it, he stood hesitant.

A light laugh from overhead twitched McKay's eyes back. Vicente, with a lightning change, seemed to have become good humored.

"Who struck down that one?" he asked.

"I," curtly answered McKay.

"Yes? With what?"

The Northerner moved one fist.

"So? The bare hand? And he—a *sargento*—should have had a revolver.

Sargento, where is your weapon?"

Yanga looked uncomfortable. Behind McKay sounded a reply.

"It is here, King. The mighty Oom Keh set his foot on it and then gave it to a real warrior, to me, Cononaco."

"Yes?" Another purring laugh. "Give it to the commandant of the garrison, Cononaco. *Sargento!* To me!"

Head hanging, Yanga came forward. The grandees let him pass through. Stooping, Vicente seized the man's blouse, strained, yanked, tore away the whole right shoulder, with its maroon tab, cast it behind him. Then he struck the degraded soldier in the face.

"Go!" he ordered.

Yanga, disgraced before all men, went, with a poisonous look at McKay.

"THE BARE hand," repeated Vicente amusedly. "And he has lain long without sense. What is the trick of it, mighty one?"

A grim smile stretched the Northerner's mouth. Folding up the passport, he returned the papers to their pocket, then cast a coldly twinkling eye on the nurser of the poniard.

"I'll show you," he promised. "You heard this poll parrot call me a dog? Watch closely." Then, to him of the purple sash, "Guard yourself!"

He leaped as he spoke. With a hiss of breath the other drew his dagger and stabbed underhand for the abdomen. A sidestep—a left hand parry—a right hand jolt to the jaw—the steel was fended aside and its wielder staggered. Quick as lightning the low hanging left swung in a terrific uppercut. A crack—a white clad form lengthening backward—a thump on the soil. Under the plane lay the poll parrot, a red trickle oozing from his gashed jaw.

"Quite simple, as you see," McKay composedly remarked, flexing his fingers and casting a speculative glance along the faces of the other wearers of the purple. "If you'd like further demonstrations I'll be glad to oblige."

The involuntary retrograde movement of the others, as well as their simultaneous reach toward dagger hilts, showed that all understood his words. Vicente burst into a rapid, high pitched laugh of real enjoyment.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! *Por Dios*, you are the most amusing fellow!" he exclaimed. "So—and so!" He swung both hands in amateurish imitation of the Northerner's blows. "And Basilio becomes a sleeper. Ha-ha-ha! I must keep you for a time and let you teach me the way of it, as well as the way of flying this machine. Yes, you shall live—for a time."

McKay gave him a piercing gaze. When he spoke his voice was cold.

"Very kind of you. Kindly understand that I have my own ideas as to how long I shall live and what I shall do in the meantime. Also kindly understand that I am not your prisoner but a peaceful visitor—but that I am quite willing to become non-peaceful on further provocation." His right hand moved a little nearer to the adjacent holster. "I am becoming infernally weary of your attitude, Vicente. Either you will now receive my proofs of identity and show me the hospitality due me, or—I shall know what to do."

Vicente stood momentarily speechless. Anger flashed again over his face, succeeded by doubt and keen probing of the steely gray eyes. The cold dignity and aggressive assurance of his visitor seemed to impress him forcibly. Presently he replied, with a formality matching that of McKay:

"Very well. What are those other proofs of which you have spoken?"

"A letter from my grandfather McKay to his friend José Martinez. It was written five years ago, when I first thought of coming to visit this place. Also a photograph of him. It happens that I strongly resemble him. The letter and the passport should be sufficient. If they are not, Cononaco here, who remembers my grandfather, can vouch for me. Do you care to see and hear these things, or—" He left the question unfinished.

The other's glittering gaze flitted to

Cononaco. That veteran, hearing his name spoken by McKay and catching the look of his king, stumped forward, unbidden. McKay turned to him.

"Cononaco," he prodded, "am I the great Oom Keh, born again?"

"*Sí!*" stoutly asserted the oldster. "Blood of his blood and bone of his bone. The eyes of Cononaco have seen."

"*Bien.*" McKay produced a large envelope, tore it open, extracted a sheet of paper and an unmounted photograph. "Who is this man?"

Cononaco squinted. The picture was that of a white haired, smooth shaven, thin faced and hollow eyed old man who, despite the burden of age, still fronted life with inflexible determination and indomitable will.

"Oom Keh!" shouted Cononaco. "Oom Keh, the old one! Oom Keh, the hard one! Oom Keh who followed the trails with Ho Seh—and with Cononaco! It is the ghost of Oom Keh!"

"Quite right. And now hear the last words of Oom Keh to the White Ones."

Unfolding the sheet, he read slowly, translating into Spanish for the benefit of the old fellow who hung eagerly on every word:

"New York, May 31, 1995.

"To José Martinez and David Rand, or their descendants:

"I am near the end of the trail. My grandson, Meredith, has said he would some day go to your jungle and try to find you. He is just fool enough to do it. Therefore, I send greetings and farewell by his hand. I ask you to welcome him as you would welcome me.

"I have heard vaguely and indirectly that your kingdom prospers. I am glad. I hope your successors prove worthy of you.

"Knowlton and Ryan are dead. I soon shall be. I think it hardly probably that you, José and Dave, are now alive to receive this. But I send with this my latest—and last—photograph.

"Be good to the boy. He is Knowlton's grandson as well as my own. Aside from being an adventurous ass (as we five were in our day) he is solid. You can tie to him.

"No more. We may meet again 'beyond the ranges'.

"Yours
—RODERICK MCKAY"

McKAY ceased. For a moment there was silence. Slowly Cononaco nodded.

"The voice of Oom Keh," he said, still peering at the photograph. "Few words. Much meat. That was Oom Keh. And he is gone. All are gone. All but old Cononaco. All but old Cononaco."

Dolefully he repeated the refrain, his voice dying away.

Vicente stirred. During the reading his narrow stare had not once moved from the young American and the old White Indian standing so close together. Now he half turned and scanned the interior of the plane, seemed to debate for an instant, turned back, stepped overside and sprang to earth.

Unspeaking, he extended a hand for the letter. McKay handed it and the picture to him, then drew out and tendered his corroborative passport. Vicente, flanked on either side by his courtiers, carefully studied the credentials, holding them in such a position that he could also watch his visitor's right hand.

McKay bit back a grin of derision while he in turn watched the king. The continued wariness of the other inspired in him mingled amusement and scorn, and the feeling was intensified by his nearer view of the royal person. The purple garments, he now noticed, were of silk. The black hair fell almost to the shoulders and shone as if oiled. On the left wrist was a broad jeweled bracelet, and on several fingers blazed diamonds and emeralds. Even the kingly feet were ornamented, being encased in soft slippers decked with big buckles of gold.

"Lord, what a fop!" thought the descendant of Oom Keh the Mighty. "If this is what rules this kingdom it's no wonder that an old-timer like Cononaco spits poison. What would granddad say if he could see this purple pajama'd pup? By Zeus! What wouldn't he say?"

He turned mirthful eyes to Cononaco, who was watching him intently. The cripple's answering look was heavy with warning. McKay sobered.

Again Vicente moved. Another of his

incredibly swift changes had come over him and, face suddenly alight with friendliness, he stepped forward with hand outstretched.

"Welcome, McKay!" he cried. "I can no longer doubt you. You will pardon, when I tell you my reasons—that Ecuador is our enemy, that Quito has sent flying men to spy on us. So, when another such man comes, what am I to think? But now that I know you, my friend, it shall be different! My poor house and all that I have, yes, all the Kingdom of Oriente, are yours to command. Will you forgive and forget?"

His smile now was winning, his gaze frank, his handclasp hearty. His visitor's good humor returned.

"Nothing to forgive, old chap," he laughed. "A mutual misunderstanding. We'll forget it. Now will you put men around this machine to guard it awhile? Let nobody touch it."

"Ah, yes!" The acquiescence was instantaneous. "It is not badly broken anywhere? It can be made to fly again?"

So eager were the questions that a shrewd suspicion darted through the newcomer's mind. He shrugged, and answered in an offhand way:

"I can't tell until I've made an examination. A high speed plane like this has some delicate parts, you know. That's why I don't want it monkeyed with. Later on, when it's cooler, I'll look it over."

"Ah, just so. Not so much as a finger shall touch it. I am desolated, my friend, that we shot you down. If I had only known— But enough! Oliverio! Place a guard of honor about the machine. Order that any one who lays hand on it be shot at once. Any one except Señor McKay."

A HEAVY set, hard mouthed man, wearing the aristocratic purple stripe, but standing aside from the other lords, touched his breast in acknowledgment, then called imperatively to the soldiery which, at a respectful distance, had stood stolidly awaiting orders. At once they moved forward.

"And now come and sample my poor hospitality, comrade," pursued Vicente, with a jovial nod. "Wine, women, whatever I have to offer. Oh—ah—pardon, a moment! I was forgetting. Blas, look at Basilio. Is he dead?"

Blas, another of the royal guard, stepped to the inert victim of McKay's uppercut. After an examination he replied—

"He lives, my king."

"Ah. Remove his sash. He will not need it longer. Have him pulled away from the machine. When he awakes tell him to leave the mesa and not to return."

Blas grinned. With evident relish, he removed the purple insignia from the sprawling figure and, with a bow, presented it to Vicente. The others watched with broad smiles.

"A man who can be half killed with the bare hand is of no use to me," Vicente quietly remarked.

Negligently stuffing the sash into a pocket, he turned away and passed an arm through McKay's, directing him toward the big house which, though outwardly as plain as any other, evidently was the palace. His armclasp was comradely, guileless, but somehow it happened that he used his left arm, thus hampering movement of his visitor's right and leaving his own right hand free. Perhaps it was merely coincidence that in his girdle, on that right side, nestled a jeweled poniard.

Together they ambled away, the king laughing, apologizing, promising, all at once; his newly found friend answering lazily and briefly. After a few steps McKay slowed and glanced around.

"Let the old man come along," he suggested. "He's rather amusing, don't you think?"

"Ha-ha! Yes, of course, if you want him. A funny old clown who will never die, that one. The last of the old ones. Cononaco! *Aquí!*"

Cononaco, somberly leaning on his staff and peering after them, quickened

into life and began hobbling after. McKay gave him a friendly wave and moved onward. But he caught a swift, mute answer from the "funny old clown". As if losing his balance for an instant, the cripple threw out the hand not engaged with his stick; and that hand made in the air the wriggling sign of a snake.

CHAPTER IV

TABLE TALK

WITHIN a cool, shadowy room whose walls were virtually obscured by silk hangings and tapestries of priceless featherwork, King Vicente and his courtiers and the stranger from the sky lolled at a great mahogany table and smoked postprandial cigars.

Around them passed handsome girls, removing from the board the vestiges of such a dinner as McKay never before had tasted. Jungle resident though he was, Vicente was an epicure; and the fish, meats, vegetables and fruits on which he and his circle feasted were so skilfully prepared, so cunningly spiced, that the Northerner still thought hungrily of them, though he could not now eat another mouthful. So, too, with wines and liqueurs and tobacco: all were mellow, subtly soothing, yet exhilarating, their flavor and aroma being enhanced, perhaps, by the fact that goblet and cigar casket were of solid gold. All the table service, in fact, was of the same precious metal, its massive pieces gleaming on the mahogany like tributes to an emperor.

In a broad bowl in the midst of the board bloomed a profusion of rare flowers. And the low, lilting music of guitars, unobtrusive yet seductive, which stole through the partition beyond the foot of the long board—this added the final sensuous touch to the sybaritic repast. Although the players remained unseen, one could vision them as alluring, silken gowned women playing at once with the vibrant strings of their instruments and with the hearts of men.

No women sat at the table. If Vicente had a queen, or queens, none was visible. Only his satellites and his guest shared his meal, and masculine mirth and jests were unrestrained. Now that the king had evinced friendship toward the outlander his retinue had done likewise. The atmosphere surrounding the visitor was that of easy goodfellowship, to which he responded in kind.

The only jarring note in the harmony of tone and spirit was the presence of scarred, half nude old Cononaco, squatting bolt upright against a wall near his ruler and McKay. A place at the royal table, or even a share of the viands, was not for him. Silent, motionless, grim, the veteran held himself there without the glimmer of a smile, his eyes fixed straight before him, a veritable death's head at the feast.

To him McKay's glance strayed from time to time. And now, as the table was cleared, he suggested—

"Our old friend here looks a bit hungry, Vicente."

"Yes?" The king cast a look at the withered figure and yawned. "He never goes hungry long, Meredito. Every one feeds him. But if it pleases you— *Mozas*, give the old one whatever he likes."

Two of the girls, bearing golden platters, stopped and stooped before the ancient. After comparing the contents, he coolly took one of the dishes from its bearer, balanced it on his knees, filled both hands, and crammed his mouth, chewing with a speed which betrayed keen appetite. Vicente, viewing his crude attack, wrinkled his nose and turned his head away.

"Barbarian!" he remarked. "An old animal who should be buried."

"It was he and other animals like him who made it possible for *you* to eat," caustically reminded McKay.

AN UNPLEASANT look passed over the king's face. The others slid sidelong glances at the undiplomatic Northerner. A momentary hush, broken only by the veteran's mouth noises, held the room. Then Vicente laughed loudly.

"Ha-ha! Yes, perhaps. It does not matter. Let us speak of things more pleasant. The flying machine, now—you are quite sure that it is not wrecked?"

"Not wrecked, no," drawled McKay, toying with his cigar. "It's whole. But it may be almost as useless as if it were smashed. I can't tell yet. And I'm too lazy and contented just now to think of any kind of work. I've eaten at some of the most famous places in the world, Vicente, but I've never had such a meal as this."

At that the host's expression was transformed.

"Nor," added his guest, "have I ever dined in such magnificence. You live like an emperor."

"And why should I not?" responded Vicente, flushing with gratification. "I have an empire. A small one, perhaps, but one which shall be greater! Yes, *por Dios*, much greater! This is only the beginning—"

He caught his tongue. McKay, betraying only casual interest, puffed at his cigar.

"But it is large enough," the ruler went on rapidly. "What is size, my friend, what are lands and waters, unless they yield wealth to their master? And this little empire of Oriente which I rule is rich, rich! So rich that Ecuador and Peru are mere louse covered beggars compared to it. And those beggars think to seize it! Ho-ho! They shall learn, when they feel my whip on their backs!"

Again he checked himself. But he was too warm with pride and wine to cease boasting. Soon he broke out again.

"Rich!" he repeated. "My wines, my jewels, my silks, my guns—whatever I wish for—all come to me from the centers of Europe, my friend. I have only to fling handfuls of gold to those nations, and they bow and deliver whatever I require. And of gold I have endless treasure. My mountains burst with it!"

McKay nodded lazily.

"It's easy to see that," he remarked. "The empire of Oriente, eh? My grandfathers used to call it No Man's Land. I think they said both Peru and Ecuador claimed it, but neither of them could control it; the head hunters were too active over here. So José Martinez just grabbed it and made it his own. But why is it that your kingdom is not yet recognized by the world powers, Vicente?"

"Not recognized? In what way?" Vicente looked puzzled and vexed.

"Diplomatically. Why don't they send ambassadors here to represent them, and why don't you send yours—"

"Ambassadors! Spies!" snapped Vicente. "No spies from any nation can enter my land! Not even priests—sneaking dogs that they are! This is *my* land, and none but my people shall stay in it!"

"I see."

The Northerner flicked off an ash. To himself he said:

"So you're deliberately cutting yourself off from the world and all modern ideas, and your brags about the other nations bowing down to you are empty wind. I thought so. You're an awful fool, if you only knew it. But you're interesting, anyhow."

Aloud he said:

"If I remember correctly, that was the original founder's idea—to keep everybody out, at least until the nation was strong enough to command respect. Seems to me the old man mentioned that."

"It was," nodded the king. "And it was wise. Our people have always obeyed that command of José. Many of his ideas were poor, and I have changed them." His tone was patronizing as he belittled his ancestor's ability. "But in that matter I have followed his will, yes, even further than he meant. He, and Rand too, had the silly idea that when Oriente should become great it must cultivate the friendship of other countries. What sense is there in being polite to nations of whom you have no fear? Bah! The old ones were astonishingly simple in some ways. But now—you seem to know much about my people, Meredito. Let me hear something of yours—and of you."

His tone had again become suave; but

his questioner caught a glint in his eye which hinted at renewed suspicion.

VICENTE had already said more than he wished to, and was probing in his turn.

"Why, there's not much to tell," the Northerner deprecated. "My grandfathers—McKay and Knowlton—were down here three times, I believe, about seventy-five or eighty years ago, and knew José Martinez very well. Later on, quite a long time later, I guess, they married and settled down somewhat, though they still used to travel a good deal. They both had children, and Knowlton's daughter married McKay's oldest son, and I'm the result.

"Grandfather McKay lived until about four years ago. Died very suddenly, by the way; sat down to read a paper, and when somebody spoke to him about ten minutes later he was dead. His heart, you know. Grandfather Knowlton's been dead nearly fifteen years; died of pneumonia. The other old-timer, Tim Ryan, who was down here with them, got killed by lightning some years ago while he was out fishing in a small boat. All three of those old fellows went through battle and murder and sudden death when they were about our age, Vicente; took all kinds of hair raising chances, and finally died like men who'd never been outside their home town. They were great old cronies as long as they lived. It was hearing them talk about things down here that made me want to come and see you.

"I haven't done much, myself. Just drifted around and tried whatever excitement came along. I'd have visited you sooner, but I was busy for a while in the war."

"Ah! Yes! The war!" Vicente leaned forward. "I have heard something of that. Tell me more."

McKay yawned.

"Why, it's a rather tiresome subject. You know what it was about, of course. The Mohammedans and other non-Christians tried to wipe out the Christians of the world. They've been wanting to do it for several hundred years, but they've always been held back by the facts that they never could combine all their strength—they fought among themselves instead of working together—and that their weapons were always antiquated. Besides, Europe kept an eye on them and held them down.

"But finally they managed to unite long enough to become dangerous. Their secret societies kept things really secret, put spies in all the European capitals and gathered a tremendous amount of war material; trained huge armies in Asia and Africa, and worked out all the plans. Then they appointed various prophets to perform miraculous tricks and preach a holy war. When they had worked up the right fanaticism they struck.

"They had to strike first at Europe, of course. America was too far away for them to hit until they had massacred the Europeans. There was a good bit of trouble in America, too, with assassinations of high officials and mysterious damage to Government war plants and so on; but it was nothing like what hit Europe, with millions of trained men swarming at her from Asia and Africa. America had to come in to help settle the row, as usual. It took three years for all of us together to smash them—1996 to 1999."

Vicente nodded.

"But I cannot understand," he puzzled, "how Europe and America allowed those savages to become so strong."

"Fools," was the laconic explanation. "Pacifists. Peace preaching people so blind that they couldn't see anything but their pet idea.

"IT STARTED a long time ago, away back in 1920, or thereabouts, after a war which they called the World War in those days. It wasn't really a world war, of course—only a war among the white nations; but it shook things up, and the same thing happened as when you shake up champagne and pull the cork. All the froth came to the top; that is, all the wise fools. They yelped that there must be no more war, and so on.

"And there were so many of them that after awhile the white nations nearly disarmed themselves, the idea being that if they had no weapons they wouldn't fight! Asinine, of course. People will always fight when there's something to fight over. If they haven't any weapons they'll strangle one another with bare hands. And while these Christian fools were nearly crippling themselves the non-Christian part of the world was licking its chops and sharpening its teeth and waiting.

"All I know about those times, of course, is what I've heard the old-timers say. But I know a good deal about what resulted. I was in it.

"There were some men who were not fools, and they kept working to keep the white world ready for more war. And there were small wars here and there which proved well enough that there would be bigger ones sometime. But, as old Tim Ryan used to say, 'The fools will never be dead, because the young fools grow up before the old ones die.' And between one treaty and another and movements to celebrate the second millennium of Christianity—this year—by worldwide brotherly love, and similar slop— Well, Europe and America went into a trance and Asia and Africa kept awake. And now Europe is nursing a black eye and a bloody nose. America got her clothes torn a little, too."

"But the enemies, they are conquered?"

"Oh, yes. Smashed flat. You see, they fought with the old fashioned weapons—guns and powder and such stuff. We used those weapons too, of course, but we had better ones. Modern warfare is waged largely by electricity and chemicals and gas and—" he checked a moment—"and similar things," he concluded vaguely.

The king eyed him.

"What are the similar things?" he pressed.

"Oh, I couldn't explain. Highly technical. Only the experts know." The Northerner stirred restively, and seemed about to abandon the entire subject. Vicente, however, cut in quickly with:

"The gas, then. That is used—how?"

"Dropped, when practical. Aerial bombs. Dropped from big planes to fall to windward of troops. Kills almost instantly. With enough planes and enough bombs you can wipe them out by regiments. The trouble was that we didn't have enough of them at first."

"So. And the electricity?"

"Lightning. Manmade lightning. Controlled so that it can be shot anywhere. Blows up your enemy's ammunition, if he uses guns. Destroys his airplanes. Disables his ships. Not easily portable, though. But it's tremendous when you get it into action."

"Ah. Not suitable for use in this region?"

"No. Your own weapons are undoubtedly best for the conditions here."

"So I find them. Ah, about the planes, as you call them. You were a flying man in the war? An officer, perhaps?"

"Captain of a bombing outfit."

"Ah, and that is a war machine outside?"

McKay chuckled.

"Lord, no. Only my little runabout. I hop around up home in that. Just a high powered pleasure car. Most of the fellows up there have them. The roads are so crowded that it's the best way to get around."

VICENTE frowned, tapping the board with jeweled fingers and absently studying the flowers. Something was passing in his mind, but its nature was not discernible. Presently he remarked, as if speaking with divided attention:

"Here we have no crowds on the roads and no planes. I have heard of the machines, of course, but they were said to be dangerous and unreliable."

"The old fashioned ones," conceded the flyer, "they were clumsy. Made a frightful noise, couldn't land safely except in a big firm field; couldn't fly far without renewing fuel. They used bulky gasoline. That sort of plane was used in granddad's time. The modern ones are like a

bird—fly silently, land on any small open spot, rise the same way. Fuel is highly concentrated, too. Well, now I'd like to ask—"

"One moment. If your machine can be made right you can rise again and fly?"

McKay's lids flickered almost imperceptibly. A thoughtful smile played over his boyish face.

"I can, *if* it is right," he deliberately declared. "But that word *if*, old chap, is one of the biggest words in any language. If the machine isn't exactly right, it's all wrong, until it's repaired. Now, as I was saying, I'd like to ask old Cononaco to talk awhile. Let him tell us all he remembers about the early days and my adventurous granddaddies, and yours. I'm still too helpless from your hospitality to stand up."

The lord of Oriente laughed quickly, but his lids narrowed as he studied the cripple.

Cononaco, now fed to repletion, had settled back against his wall and squatted motionless and expressionless as a sphinx. After a momentary hesitation Vicente nodded.

"As you please."

"All right. Cononaco, I have heard from Oom Keh the old one, whom you knew, the tale of how he first came to you. Now I would hear from you the story of the White Ones, and of José and his comrade Rand, who was from North America like myself. Will you tell the tale? The king gives permission."

Cononaco stirred. Slowly, stiffly, he reared himself and stood, leaning on his cane. His sharp eyes traveled along the Spanish faces, some of them drowsy, others coldly watching him, rested a second or two on that of his master, meeting there a slit eyed stare, and dwelt finally on the steady regard of McKay. With a slight movement of the chin which somehow expressed scorn of the luxury about him, he answered:

"Aye. Cononaco will speak to a man—of the days of men!"

Again his eyes sought McKay.

CHAPTER V

THE TALE OF CONONACO

"NOW THIS is the tale, Oom Keh, of the king Ho Seh, and of his three friends from the land of Norte Amerikaa, and of his comrade Ran, and of how we White Ones grew strong.

"In the beginning we were few. We were scattered about the forests of the Rio Tigre and the Rio Curaray and the mountains of this cordillera. We had no king. We had no city. We had only little places far apart, lost from each other, and these we often changed. We fought our ancient enemies at the west, the Jiveros and the Huambizas, who hunt men to shrink their heads and hunt women to make them slaves. We moved about, we killed our meat, we grew our crops, we made our children, we died. So it had been since the memory of the oldest.

"Now on the Tigre Yacu was the tribe of the chief Pachac. And in the tribe of Pachac was I, Cononaco, a young warrior. And there came up the Tigre five men to hunt gold. And one was of Peru, and he was called Ho Seh. And four were of Norte Amerikaa, and their *capitán* was the mighty Oom Keh. And the other three of these were a light one called Notun* and a red one called Rah Een† and a silent one called Ran. And this last one in later years became the great Ran of whom you shall hear.

"Now the one called Ho Seh left the others and became the son of the chief Pachac, taking all nine daughters of Pachac as his wives. And he led all the tribe of Pachac to the north. And the four led by Oom Keh also journeyed north. And all came together again at a great stone house where lived an evil witch who had much gold. And there the hunters of heads fell on them and there was a terrible battle. Even the earth shook and the stone house fell apart. And the hunters of heads were crushed. And then the five took the gold, and the four from Norte Amerikaa went away.

*Knowlton. †Ryan.

"Now in that battle the chief Pachac was killed. So his son, Ho Seh, became our chief. And we told him of the other White Ones scattered round about in the forest and the mountains. Then said Ho Seh, 'We shall bring together all the White Ones and make war on the accursed shrinkers of heads.' And we journeyed up and down the land, finding the other White Ones and talking to them about this thing. And in the end all White Ones came together into this place, which is now the city of Hoserán. For this was the strongest place in all this land, since the mountains stand around it as a wall against enemies. And here we made our home, and Ho Seh was our king.

"Now there were thirty hundreds of us when we came together. And twenty of these hundreds were women, because many of our men had been killed in fighting. So now the wise Ho Seh ordered that every man should have two women, and every woman should make herself mother to as many babes as she could bear. Ho Seh, himself, having nine wives, had many children—at first. And as soon as our boys became young men and girls turned to women they mated and made more babes. So the race of the White Ones grew fast.

"AND HO SEH himself journeyed to the Great River* and ordered men there to bring him guns and bullets and machetes. And they brought those things up the Rio Napo to the Curaray, and he paid for them with his gold, of which he had much. And he taught us the use of gun and knife in war. And with these and our bows and spears and battle clubs we raided our enemies the Jiveros. We smelled out their dens. We struck sudden and hard. We killed all men. We brought home all women and children to work at growing crops. So our women were free from work and could bear and train more of our own young. And so our enemies were weakened little by little, while we grew more strong.

"Then came again Oom Keh the hard one, and Notun the light one, and Rah Een the red one: the three fierce fighters from Norte Amerikaa. The fourth one, the silent Ran, was not with them. For Ran had come back before them; he had come alone; and he had become a leader of the Huambizas at the west, who were the worst enemies of the White Ones.

"Then Ho Seh and Oom Keh and Notun and Rah Een led all our warriors to the west to kill Huambizas and to capture Ran. But while we journeyed west Ran came east with a great army and passed us in the forest. And his Huambizas attacked this place, where our women and children were without men. But the wise Ho Seh learned of this, and we turned about and caught the accursed ones here. And we fought.

"Ah! That was a day of blood! Never has been such a battle since the memory of man. On this rock where now we talk the women and children fought like men. Down below we men crushed our foes against the stone and stabbed and shot and speared and slew. Ha! Every stone, every leaf was red with blood. And from a place among the rocks the guns of Oom Keh and Notun and Rah Een spewed death as fast as the roll of drums. And in the end Ran was shot down—men say it was done by Oom Keh himself—and the cursed ones were broken and cut into food for the vultures. *Ai*, what a day!

"But in that battle Ho Seh was struck down. So badly he was hurt that it seemed he must die. For many days he lay in his house among his queens before he could walk again. And for many days Ran lay in another house where Oom Keh and Notun and Rah Een guarded him. And down below many of us White Ones lay dead from the battle or died from our hurts, and were piled up and burned. It was a black time.

"Now the reason why Ran had brought the hunters of heads here was because a woman had bewitched him. She was a a white woman called Nuné, and very fair. And she served the god Piatzo, whom the men beyond the mountains call Dios. But she was the woman of Ran and

*The Amazon.

he was her man. And after the battle she was a captive here with him. And when the king Ho Seh rose again we expected him to kill them both. But Ho Seh did not kill them. He saw that Ran alive was a mighty leader, and that Ran dead would be nothing. So he talked to Ran. And Ran became again his friend. And Ran stayed here to help King Ho Seh in his work of making a kingdom, and his woman Nuné with him.

"Then Oom Keh and Notun and Rah Een went away. And the White Ones saw them no more. But the names of those three from Norte Amerikaa and the tales of their fighting here have lived long. And it is known that more than once they saved the life of Ho Seh the king.

"AFTER those three went Ho Seh and Ran carried on the war to the west and the south, where were our enemies. They struck as Ho Seh had struck in the times gone by. They scouted the land and destroyed one place after another, killed the men, brought back the women and children for slaves. There were no more great battles. Such battles cost too many men. The battle with the Huambizas had shrunk our army as our enemies would have shrunk our heads.

"But the women who had lost their men were mated again; the young came fast and grew steadily; so the nation increased. And with our bands always marching and killing, the Jiveros grew less. So we cleared the country little by little of the savages.

"First we cleared all the long country between this cordillera and the river Pastasa, where were many men of the Jiveros. And then we cleaned the great forest beyond the Pastasa, between that river and the Morona, which is farther to the west. At the north and the east we had no fighting, for there we had no enemies. The Napos, the Zaparos, the Yaguas, the Yameos, who live there, all are peaceful peoples. But at the west we were busy.

"In the wet time and the dry time, whether the floods rose or the waters fell to nothing, we were always fighting. And in this fighting I, Cononaco, rose to be first a *sargento*, and then a *sargento primero*, and so upward to the rank of *capitán*. And so Cononaco was often near the king, and more often near Ran. For Ran was the great chief on the fighting trails. Ho Seh himself led the warriors too, but not so much as before. He now was not so strong, because of the bad hurts which came to him in the fight with the Huambizas of Ran.

"In that fight, Oom Keh, the king was hurt in many places. And though he afterward went out on the war trails he could not endure so much. So when Ran had learned the country and its ways, Ho Seh remained more of the time on this rock while Ran went to fight. And here he trained his children so that they might carry on his work wisely in the later years. And here the queen Nuné likewise trained the babes of Ran—for Ran took no other queen than Nuné. Through all his years she was his only woman.

"Now the children of Ho Seh numbered two tens and four. And of these, ten and five were boys. And the oldest was named Ho Seh, like the king himself. And the others were Julio, Juan, Josué, Josías, Jonatán, Jonás, Joaquín, Jeromo, Jerónimo, Jorge, Jeremías, Jacobo, Jaime, and Joseito. And the girls were Judit and Josefa and—but they do not matter. And the children of Ran were six: the boys Rodrigo, Rafael, Ricardo, Roger; the girls Roberta and Rosita. And these were all that were born to the king and his war chief. For after the bad hurts of Ho Seh in that battle he had no more young. And Ran had only one queen and was away often on the war trails.

"THESE children were trained most carefully. From the oldest to the youngest of the boys, all were made to know the use of all weapons and the ways of our fighting. So if one after another should be killed in wars to come, always the oldest one left should be ready to take up the work. And in this training old Cononaco, who now tells this tale,

had much to do. For in a fight Cononaco received the hurt to the leg which now you see, and his day on the trails was done. So then he lived here on the rock, and from time to time he counseled the king and the war chief on matters of fighting, and often he instructed the young kings to be. So he saw much of how they were trained.

"To all of them, even the girls, were taught the two languages of the white men, the Spanish and that strange tongue called the Inglés. For Ho Seh and Ran said the time must come when this kingdom must deal with nations of the white men; so its rulers must speak the white tongues. And those children were taught many things about those other nations. But no man from those nations was yet allowed to enter this land. For Ho Seh said to Ran, 'First we will fight our own fight. We will make our nation strong. When it is strong it will be respected. Until then let us remain unknown'. And Ran agreed.

"So no man came in. Some tried, but they were sent out. Some came for gold. We showed them steel. They went. Some came in black robes to preach about Dios. But said Ho Seh, 'We know Dios. We need no man to tell us about him. Nor do we need any man to tell others of us. Go!' And they went.

"Now the children grew big. The young Ho Seh and his brothers and the sons of Ran went out on the war trails. Our own children grew and mated and made new children. Our city grew. Our slaves were many. And our fighting companies drove over the Morona and into the land of the Huambizas beyond. The Jivero land was cleaned from north to south. All Jiveros had been killed or made captives or driven across the Great River at the south. Across that river were other hunters of heads, the Aguarunas and Antipas.

"But we did not cross the river. For Ho Seh said, 'We fight only to make our own land. That land shall be between the Amazon at the south, the Andes at the west, the Rio Putumayo at the north and east. Beyond those two rivers and the great mountains we do not go.' So now we fought to win the country west of the Morona, to conquer the Huambizas and so reach the great mountains which were the end of our land.

"But the Huambizas fought like demons. And we were far from home. The work was bitter and hard and slow. And the sons of the king began to fall. The young Ho Seh was killed. Then the next prince, Julio. Then Juan, Josué, Josías. Five of the king's sons died so, fighting the Huambizas. And two of the sons of Ran also fell—Rodrigo and Rafael. And the hearts of Ho Seh and Ran were heavy.

"Now the hunters of heads from the south of the Great River began to trouble us. Those Jiveros who had gone south came back. With them came Aguarunas and Antipas. They came up the Morona and crept behind the backs of our men at the west. There was a bitter fight which lasted long. But we in our turn put fresh men behind our enemies from the south. And so in the end we broke them and cut them to bones. But in this fighting Ran was hurt in a leg and could march no more. So he and Ho Seh and Cononaco, all old and hurt, stayed here. And after that the young men carried on the war.

"In that war at the west, Oom Keh, fell five more sons of Ho Seh and one of Ran. They were Jonatán, Jonás, Joaquín, Jeromo, Jerónimo and Ricardo. All but Jonás died fighting their enemies, and many were the men they killed. Jonás died from the bite of a snake. And now Ho Seh had only five sons, Ran only one. But those dead sons had mated and left their own sons behind. And the girls of Ran had mated with sons of Ho Seh, and the sons of Ran girls of Ho Seh. So their blood lived on.

"NOW HO SEH died. He had ruled wisely and well for three tens of years. And now one day he played with a new kind of pistol, a flat one with its bullets in its handle, and he did not understand it well. And the pistol shot him. And he fell forward and was dead. So

died Ho Seh the wise. *Ai*, but it was a black day for the land!

"So his son Jorge became the king. But he was not the real king of the White Ones. The real king was Ran. Ran told what should be done and it was done. The captains of the army took his orders. Yet Jorge was the king in name. And he was wise, for he knew the wisdom of Ran was greater than his, and so he used it. It is a wise man who sees and uses the wisdom of other men, Oom Keh!

"Now the city had grown very fast. There was much for a king to do here at home. But Jorge went out on the war trails, as was right. Yet he did not stay long. He went up and down his land, and saw how his men fought, and killed Huambizas with his own hand. Then he came back wiser, and stayed here. This was as Ran had counseled him. And when Ran died Jorge was a strong king because of what he had learned.

"Ran lived for a ten of years after Ho Seh. And then a fever came on him and he died. He had been a mighty leader and a terrible fighter. Ha! How his green eyes would burn in a fight! Like those of a great jaguar, Oom Keh! No man could stand before him in battle. And now he was worn out from fighting and planning. So the sickness took him. And the fair queen Nuné mourned and soon died. He had been her only man.

"Now King Jorge ruled like a real king. And the Huambizas were cleared from the land even to the river Paute. That river Paute is at the bottom of the great mountains. So now King Jorge gave the word to the Huambizas beyond the Paute, 'This is our line. Beyond the Paute we do not go unless you cross it. Go where you like—west of the Paute. Cross and we fight. And if you take one head from the White Ones we take ten from you!'

"Then there was less fighting. The Huambizas did cross the Paute at times. The White Ones drove them back. But the long marchings and hard fights were done. And along our borders the king put posts of soldiers to hold the peace.

"Now along the Great River were soldiers of the land called Peru. And we made them go south of the river. And along the mountains and at the north were priests of Ecuador. And to them we said, 'Stay there. Come no farther and you shall not be harmed'. But they were not content to do so. The soldiers would come back and the priests would come on. Yet when they found us firm they thought again and stayed where we told them to stay. But they hated us. They hate us now.

"Jorge lived five tens of years from his birth to his death. And in his time we grew fast. And after him ruled his son Gerardo. And we grew even more fast. There were fights with our old enemies, but they were few. There were troubles with men of Peru and men of Ecuador. But we held our lines. We kept our own land. We stayed in our own country, as Ho Seh had long ago commanded. And we made other men stay in theirs.

"And now, Oom Keh, rules the king Vicente, the son of Gerardo. And his greatness is plain to your eyes.

"So the tale is told. We who were thirty hundreds when Ho Seh brought us together are now ten hundreds of hundreds. This place where first we gathered is the city of Hoserán. This wild land which was that of the hunters of heads is the kingdom of Oriente. This is the work of the old ones, the wise ones and the sons they left behind them. These things the eyes of Cononaco have seen, of Cononaco, who once fought the battles of the king and counseled his warriors and his princes, and who now is only a lame old dog to bark at the table of his master. And what things shall come hereafter the eyes of Cononaco are too dim to see. So Cononaco says no more."

CHAPTER VI

THE FLAME QUEEN

FOR A minute the ornate room was still. The veteran's voice, thin at the beginning of his tale, had deepened as he went on, swinging into the sonorous ca-

dence which had been his in the days when he was the counselor of kings. Now the silence was that which succeeds the steady tolling of a deep toned bell.

Through that hushed interval McKay sat motionless, his dead cigar forgotten, his attention still riveted on the historian. Concise though the chronicle had been, it had conjured up shadowy hosts of warriors, the roar of bygone battles in gloomy jungle depths, the flame and smoke of destroyed habitations, long lines of marching woman slaves; and, here in the mountain bowl, three grim old cripples fighting on together to train up a new, strong civilization to replace the diabolical savagery which they were destroying.

In the mind of the Northerner who since boyhood had heard the tales of his own ancestors regarding their part in these things, the ghosts now thronging his thoughts were once more alive.

Then the phantoms of the past grew dim, and the present became the more significant for their temporary resurrection. The occasional caustic note which had crept into the voice of the narrator, the veiled sarcasm with which he had hinted at the self-sufficiency of the existent régime, had not been lost on his American auditor. Nor had the listener failed to notice the omission of any praise for the latest rulers—Gerardo and Vicente. Indeed, the very silence of the veteran regarding their characters and achievements was eloquent. Yet to Vicente himself that silence seemed gratifying, as did also the single satiric reference to his greatness; for now, as the "lame old dog" once more stood mute and inscrutable, his master beamed.

"Well told, old one," he approved. "Girl, give him a full goblet!"

One of the serving girls poured wine. Cononaco quaffed it without change of expression. From behind the partition, where the music had died during the recital, stole again the thrum of the guitars. And from farther down the table sounded a snore.

"*Por Dios!*" snickered Vicente, glancing in that direction. "Timoteo sleeps again. Is he ever awake?"

Timoteo, a portly grandee, was slumbering with head sunk on his chest. Others, too, were nodding or looked drowsy. The interest with which the Northerner had listened obviously was not shared by them; and, sluggish from food and the habit of siesta, all were half asleep. McKay grinned.

"It might be well if we all took siesta," he suggested. "I'm a bit sleepy myself. Have you a little house where I can—"

"This house," interrupted his host. "A room has been made ready for you. As you say, perhaps we should rest until the heat passes. And then we shall look at the plane, yes?"

"All right."

McKAY stretched himself.

"Later on, though, I'd like a little house of my own, if it can be arranged. A place where I can keep my *caballito* under the roof with me. It won't do it any good to get soaked by rain, you know."

At that the king's look changed. He had frowned a little when his guest asked for separate quarters, but at mention of the machine he quickly nodded. And now another thought brought a sly smile.

"Ah yes, I understand," he laughed. "A little place where you may have your little horse—and also, perhaps, a pleasant companion or two? It shall be arranged. As I have said before, Meredito, anything my little empire can furnish is yours. And—"

"Thanks, but my little horse is my only companion, if you don't mind," coolly interrupted McKay. "I'm not much of a ladies' man."

"No? Ha-ha! Perhaps when you have become better acquainted here, my friend— A moment! Anita! You and the others, come here!"

The guitars abruptly fell silent. A rustle, then a portiere was lifted, and through a doorway came the players; three girls, creamy skinned, dark eyed, gowned in sleeveless silken draperies of

crimson shade, which were caught together over the left shoulders only, leaving the shapely right arms and shoulders bare. All smiled with easy familiarity at their king, darted flashing glances at his guest of honor and demurely cast down their eyes. But the little smiles still playing on their lips showed that their apparent shyness before the stranger was more assumed than real.

The stranger also smiled, the same quizzical smile which had been on his face when the soldiery charged at him. Vicente flicked a keen glance at him and grinned.

"You have traveled more widely than I, my friend," he suggested. "Tell me, which of these three is most pleasing to your eye?"

McKay looked at them deliberately, one by one. As he did so, the three pairs of long lashed lids lifted, and under them the dark eyes burned into his own. The fleeting coyness was gone; each now strove to lure this tall young judge to favor her. And Vicente, his cynical grin widening, watched all four.

"I can't say," calmly replied the Northerner. "All three are beautiful, Vicente."

With that he turned his gaze down the table. The three pairs of seductive eyes suddenly turned spiteful. The king scowled. The other men, all of whom, except Timoteo, had become very much awake, relaxed from their intent attitides. With a sharp wave of the hand Vicente dismissed the sirens. They departed with a resentful swish.

As they vanished, Cononaco limped forward and set his goblet on the table. His glance met McKay's; and, though he did not smile, over his face flitted a gleam of amused approval.

"*Bien*," shrugged Vicente. "Let us rest."

RISING, Vicente led the way into a patio, and thence into a cool room where a low, luxurious bed and a feather trimmed hammock offered a choice of lounging places. With a brief formula of good wishes for pleasant rest he made his exit. McKay surveyed the place, shut the door, sauntered to the hammock, lolled in it, lighted a cigaret and laughed silently.

"So here we are, my dear friend Meredito," he told himself. "In the metropolis of Hoserán— Hm! José. Ran. José-Ran. Hoserán. Not bad. It's a wonder that the present incumbent—or encumbrance—hasn't changed the name to San Vicente. Well, here we are, and it looks as if we'd have an interesting visit. Now I wonder, my dear friend Vicente, what's on your mind. The plane, for one thing. That seems to be be considerably more important than the man who owns it; and something tells me that your sudden graciousness hinges on the fact that I'm a quite necessary adjunct to said plane. Probably this is the first one that's been brought down without being hopelessly smashed. But just what do you figure on doing with my little bug? I wonder."

Slowly swinging, he squinted at his cigaret as if that would answer him. Then he took another puff and let his thoughts run on:

"You folks are certainly away behind the times, with not even one plane of your own. But still, it's easy enough to see why. Until lately you've had no use for them; you've been busy with Indian fighting in the thick jungle, where it was all ground work. And now you're so self-centered and self-satisfied that you don't want to go anywhere outside your own bounds, or let any one from outside come in to give you new ideas. So about all you've done to modernize yourselves is to get an anti-aircraft gun, or maybe more than one, to knock off chaps who may occasionally come visiting, or spying, as you call it. And even your shells for that purpose are duds, luckily for me. If those you popped at me had exploded as they ought I'd be spattered all over the place now. But your gunner is quick and accurate. He'd have gotten me if I hadn't been a good dodger.

"Well, thus far the situation stands about like this— All Ecuadorean planes sent over have been shot down. State of

war exists against all comers. King says he'll thrash both Ecuador and Peru. Humph! Wonder if he really believes that? And he wants to pump me dry through a pretty spy or two. Must think I'm simple. Snaky sort of specimen. Dangerous. Cononaco calls him a Jivero. Wonder just what he means by that. One thing's sure, there's something rotten in the state of Denmark. I detect a very ancient and a fishlike smell, and I think it emanates from one Vicente. Well, we shall see what we shall see."

Again the devil may care smile inherited from his Knowlton ancestry lightened the craggy features bequeathed him by his McKay progenitor. Snapping the cigaret butt toward a nearby clay jar, he dropped the hand casually to his holster. Abruptly the smile vanished and he sat up, clawing about him in the hammock; then he arose and scanned the floor beneath it. The holster was empty.

Etiquette to the contrary notwithstanding, he had not divested himself of that weapon on entering his host's house. Observing that his companions did not lay aside their daggers, he had coolly retained his pistol. He had not touched it since then. His right hand neighbor had been beyond convenient arm's reach. Neither hammock nor floor disclosed any sign of it now. Yet it had utterly disappeared.

"So!" he muttered, scowling doorward. "A neat piece of sneak thievery, you purple chameleon! You kept at my left, though. One of your good looking waitresses probably did the pickpocket work. And one reason why you tried to wish another lady on me was to find out whether I had another weapon on me anywhere, I'll bet. I'm more charmed by your hospitality every minute. But you're clumsy. Altogether too clumsy."

His right hand slipped to his left side. There, below the armpit, concealed under his loose shirt, nestled another, shorter, but no less powerful gun.

"Go ahead and have your little jokes," he murmured. "I'll have a few myself, perhaps. I can think of three good ones at this minute. This little gun, and the fact that my little horse isn't damaged in the least, and a little thing that I might have told you about Ecuador—but won't, now. And I'm going to learn as many more jokes as I can in the shortest time possible."

WITH that he flung himself back into the hammock, relaxed again, and presently dozed. He did not, however, lose all consciousness. Somewhere among his drowsy senses a little monitor sat awake, listening for any sound which might indicate tampering with the airplane. Although that machine was heavily guarded, the king's rigorous command obviously did not apply to the king himself; and it was quite possible that instead of taking his siesta he was again prying into its mysteries.

As its owner had just said, the dragon fly was uninjured. Its crazily veering descent, apparently a desperate fight to keep from crashing in utter ruin, had in reality been absolutely under the control of a master hand; and unless some strain had resulted from the spin of the actual landing, which was unlikely, it was ready to hop off again at any moment. This fact, however, its daredevil master purposed to keep to himself until he should feel inclined to reveal it.

It was altogether possible, of course, that in the interim the plane might become actually disabled. The keen interest in it of Vicente, however, seemed sufficient assurance that such a contingency was hardly probably within the ensuing few hours. But the little listener within the napping flyer kept one ear open.

From the outer mesa came no disturbing sound. But presently, from a point much nearer, stole one which caused the tiny sentry to flash an alarm along somnolent nerves. It was the almost imperceptible tread of soft stepping feet.

The gray eyes opened and slid from side to side. They discerned nothing but the cane wall, unornamented, stretching from corner to corner before him. The faint footfalls seemed to be somewhere at

his back; not close, but within the room, and passing deliberately toward the foot of his taut hammock. If they continued that course the intruder would soon come within sight. Motionless, he waited.

Quietly, carefully, yet without ominous stealth, the soft soles stole onward. As they neared the high hung loop at the end of the net, the intent auditory nerves of the listener detected another sound, the rustle of cloth. To his nostrils, too, drifted a faint perfume. Thereupon a thin smile flitted across his lips, a twinkle dawned and died within his eyes, and his lids drooped to the narrowest of slits. Utterly inert, he lay peering through his lashes.

"Another pretty pickpocket," he thought, "sent in to abstract the rest of my armament, if any. Very well, lady. Come on. But the second you touch me you'll think a steel trap has snapped shut on your wrists."

The trap, however, remained unsprung, for no hand touched him. Into his limited range of vision moved a figure gowned in flame hued silk. It paused, resumed advance, now directly approaching him, stopped again, some ten feet away, and remained standing. In the ensuing silence he felt an intent gaze studying his face.

Still masking his own surveillance, he now made out clearly a tall, slender form concealed, yet faintly revealed, by the folds of silk. Not only was that robe of different color than the bold gowns of the sirens recently seen, but it was far more modest in cut. Its hem barely cleared the insteps of small white feet shod with silken sandals, each ornamented with a single large topaz. Its sleeves, wide and loose, half covered long, aristocratic hands on which no rings gleamed. Those hands hung in purposeless repose, the flexible fingers betraying no nervousness or stealthy intent. Nor did the regular rise and fall of the half glimpsed bosom betoken inner excitement. The poise of this woman, whose face still was screened from view by his own drooping lids, was calmly confident; indeed, almost regal.

His eyes opened, looking straight into a girlish face, hazel eyed, dimple cheeked, full lipped, which, framed in loosely coiffeured hair of raven black, smiled down in frank amusement. The sudden impact of his sharp gaze caused no fading of that smile, no movement of surprise. Clear and candid, the wide pupils continued to center on his, seeming to read his thoughts. Upon him came the feeling that his pretense had been but self-deception; that she had been well aware of his sly scrutiny and found in it food for merriment.

A SMILE of response quirked his mouth. For a few seconds, however, he neither spoke nor moved. As calmly as she had just studied him, he now scanned her anew, noting particularly a broad band of gold about her brow, whence softly blazed another topaz, a great stone within which faintly burned a yellow fire tinted with red. That glowing gem held his attention for the space of several slow breaths. In its suggestively royal setting, as well as in the flame hued robe and the jeweled sandals, he sensed a symbolic significance which he could not at once interpret. Princess or priestess she might be; perhaps both, perhaps neither. Then, as eye again met eye, these externals vanished completely from his mind; for he found himself gazing at a very winsome and human girl.

"*Buenas tardes, señorita,*" he greeted, sitting up; then, with leisurely movements, rising to his feet.

"Good afternoon, Señor McKay," she responded, in English.

Her voice, softly modulated, held a note of mirth. Her eyes, now a little below his own, retained their smile. After an instant, however, they moved quickly aside, and her tone became more subdued as she added—

"Speak softly."

In answer he spoke not at all. Instead he lifted his brows, then glanced at the thin partitions of cane and nodded. Thereafter, probing her face, he stood waiting.

Her smile faded now, and she regarded him seriously. Soon she said—

"Señor, you have done yourself no good in coming here, and you will do well to go quickly—if you can."

"Yes?"

"Yes. If your sky bird can be made to fly again, make it fly."

He eyed her quizzically. Was she, despite her apparent candor, a tool of Vicente, sent to learn the real condition of the plane?

"Why should I?" he dryly countered.

The wide pupils contracted, and a little frown gathered under the gold circlet. Again he felt that she was looking straight into his mind and reading his thoughts.

"You should," she curtly retorted.

With that she turned as if to go. Then she faced him once more.

"If that is impossible," she added, "ask Cononaco to tell you of some way out and take that way at once. You can trust Cononaco, but nobody else. Good day, señor."

She stepped away, her movements now decisive. With one long stride he overtook her, laid hand on one smooth shoulder, and drew her about.

In his compelling grasp she twitched sharply away, eyes flashing. But he kept his grip.

"Not so fast, princess, not so fast," he laughed. "Pardon me for stopping you, and also for thinking what I may have thought. And let me thank you for your warning. But maybe I'd value that warning more if I knew who was delivering it."

"That need not matter, señor."

Her tone now was haughty; and, though she no longer tried to evade him, her whole body was rigid with resentment.

For a long second he met her angry gaze, his own eyes still a-twinkle. Then he relaxed his hold and dropped his hand.

"As you please." He bowed slightly. "But I'd really like to know."

SHE STOOD motionless a moment, still offended, yet once more reading his steady regard. Then her expression softened and a faint smile came and went.

"Señor McKay, descendant of Knowlton and McKay, whose names still live here," she replied, "I am Nuné, descendant of David Rand and his wife Nuné, and also of José Martinez, first king of Hoserán. And I am La Reina de la Llama—the Queen of the Flame. Heed my warning and go. *Adios.*"

Though still held under restraint, her contralto voice came in measured cadence, as if long used to the intonation of sacerdotal chants. At the end of her brief but ceremonious speech she watched him a second longer, very serious now. Then she moved away, a rippling, softly rustling, deeply impressive figure, to the blank palm wall at one side of the wide bed.

McKay stood still, looking after her in a complex of surprise and puzzlement.

Queen of the Flame? Of what flame? Of what significance was that flame? His lips opened to call the questions, but closed with out sound. He remembered the thinness of the partitions.

Reaching the wall, she laid hand on it and pushed gently. At once a section of the cane opened without sound, seemingly turning on a pivot, a narrow, masked, revolving door. Beyond lay gloom. Into the dark opening she moved, there to turn for one final look back at him. A stray sunbeam from some tiny crevice struck fair on the great topaz on her brow, and from it blazed a living flame. Under the golden circlet the hazel eyes also seemed to glow, and between parted lips flashed a swift farewell smile. Then she was gone. The portal shut, and behind it sounded a faint thump, as if a bar softly dropped into a notch.

Tardily McKay moved. Across the floor he strode to push at the same place. No door opened for him. A dozen times he tried, changing the point of stress at each attempt. All in vain. The barrier was forbiddingly firm.

"*Adios*, then, Lady Flame Queen," he softly said, stepping back. "But no, not *adios*. *Hasta la vista*—till we meet again!"

CHAPTER VII

WHISPERS

LONG shadows streaked the plaza of the royal acropolis when the sky rider sauntered forth from the abode of the king. The sun had sunk almost to the level of the haze cloaked Andes, and its grilling glare now was largely intercepted by the row of houses at the western end of the mesa, which cast welcome coolness far across the open space. Within their shade now sat or stood small groups of purple sashed men and gorgeously gowned women whose eyes all turned to the same sight—the tall master of the plane appearing with the master of the jungle city, Vicente.

McKay, glancing to right and left at these observers, nodded and casually waved a hand in all inclusive greeting. Then he turned his eyes to the spot where he had left his machine, and halted.

"A little surprise for you, Meredito," giggled the resplendent king at his elbow. "Your little horse has a stable and you have a private house."

Where the plane had rested, unprotected save by watchmen, now stood a broad house of cane, complete from low stone foundation to thickly thatched roof. At the corners, silently vigilant, were posted riflemen. Nobody else was near the structure, no workman, no idler. Nor was any litter of building material on the ground. In the few hours since dinner, while all others took siesta, some large gang of builders summoned from the lower city had constructed the entire domicile, cleared up all odds and ends and gone, without one disturbing noise.

"Jove!" exclaimed McKay. "You're a worker of miracles, Vicente. But if your workmen have walled in my *caballito*, we can't use it, or even test it."

"No?" grinned the ruler. "Come and see."

They walked onward. As they drew near, Vicente languidly voiced a command in some language unintelligible to his companion. Two of the guards laid down their guns, stepped to the middle of the nearest blank wall, and pulled. In the wall appeared a vertical crack which widened rapidly as the men moved outward. The wall moved with them, each half swinging on hinges at the corner post. Thus the entire side of the house opened wide, revealing the compact plane at rest within. Both in length and in height the opening allowed ample space for wheeling the machine forth from its shelter.

"A neat piece of work!" McKay heartily approved. "Your people certainly know how to make doors."

Vicente grinned again, appropriating the praise to himself; then he shot a side glance at his companion, as if wondering whether he had learned of any other cleverly constructed doors. McKay, however, was walking straight to his air car, with face unreadable.

"*Sí*, we are builders—of house and city and empire and all things needed in them," responded the lord of Hoserán. "Even, with a little study, of—" He checked his tongue, but his gaze dwelt on the machine.

McKay's eyes turned to him, then away again, a spark of comprehension glinting in their depths. So that was this schemer's plan, to study this fast flyer, learn all its secrets, use it as a model, construct scores of others—and then what? Fly them, without power? The marvelously compressed energy which gave life to such craft could never be manufactured here; it must be obtained from the great government plants of America or Europe; and, despite his recent boast of ability to buy whatever he liked, he would find that those governments did not readily ship tanks of that powerful compound—useful in war as well as in peace—to unrecognized foreign consignees. If this crazy coxcomb thought he could build an air fleet. . . .

The Northerner bit back a smile and dismissed the thought for the moment. They had entered the house now. Behind them, quiet but curious, the idling lords and ladies of the rock had drifted together to watch whatever might come about.

But these, and their potentate as well, were to be disappointed, for nothing of interest took place.

McKAY climbed indolently into the cockpit, followed closely by the sharp eyed king. Ensued a number of useless fumblings and fiddlings about the controls by the owner, followed by an expressive grunt.

"What is wrong?" demanded Vicente.

"I don't know yet," was the slow reply. "Something's a little out of adjustment, apparently. I'll have to look it over more carefully tomorrow, when the light is better and I am more energetic."

He turned indifferently from his task. Vicente scowled, eying him sharply, then compressed his lips, gave way and descended to the ground. As McKay in turn set foot to earth he glanced about and remarked in the same casual tone:

"By the way, I must have dropped my little gun somewhere along here, probably when I was showing you how to knock a man over. Ask the man who found it to return it, will you?"

"A gun? You had a gun?" Bland innocence replaced the pettish frown. "Of what sort?"

"A pistol. At my belt."

"Truly? *Caramba*, I never noticed it! But it is safe, never fear, and shall be returned to you; some officer of mine must have taken charge of it. I hope you do not feel, Meredito, that you need a weapon in this—ah—uncivilized place."

A touch of spite tinged his tone as he concluded. McKay chuckled.

"You like your little joke, don't you, Vicente? No, I hardly think I need a gun here; I just don't like to lose things. But, while we're on that point, why do you and your officers go armed? I notice that you all wear daggers."

"A matter of custom, that is all," suavely responded the other. "We are a military nation. But come, now let us close these doors and then visit your own rooms. If all is not as you would have it, changes shall be made at once."

Another brief order in the dialect, and the guards swung the long twin doors shut in the faces of the attentive outsiders. Each then dropped a vertical bolt of heavy wood into a socket in the stone foundation, thus locking the wall securely from the inside. At a gesture from their master they marched to the wall at the rear of the machine, opened a smaller door, and stood stolidly at attention on either side while their king and his companion passed. Then they followed, went on through an outer exit, and were gone.

McKay found himself in a small room from which, through doorless portals, another opened on each side. A table and three comfortable chairs furnished the central room; a wide bed, two chairs, a small stand or two, and wall pegs for clothing, the one at the left; a huge tub, brimful of water, a tall mirror and a feather bedecked hammock, the third. All the furniture, even the tub, was of mahogany. After a slow glance around, the visitor's gaze centered with most interest on the tub and its inviting water.

Vicente, watching cornerwise, spoke with insinuating smile and nod toward the room at the left.

"There is ample room for two here, Meredito—or three, if you like." His head moved now toward the hammock at the right. "And, as I have said, my kingdom is at your command."

McKay met his gaze whimsically.

"Thanks, but—" He paused on the verge of blunt refusal, then smilingly amended, "A man likes to choose his own company, you know; and, to be frank, I'm rather critical. Perhaps when I have seen all the people of this rock I may be able to make a happy selection. Until then— By the way, am I to take you literally? May I have any companion I like?"

Vicente hesitated perceptibly, and his tone in answering was uncertain.

"There may be—ah—certain exceptions. That is to say—ah—one must have some regard for the position of—ah—a few. But—"

"All right, all right," laughed McKay. "I understand. When I see some one

who interests me I can consult you. And until then we needn't consider the matter."

"Precisely," agreed the king, looking relieved. "When that time comes, Meredito, be sure, it shall be arranged if possible—and to me almost anything is possible. It is a pity that you are so, as you say, critical. But it is true that one must follow one's own inclinations. Now tell me, do you find the place comfortable?"

"Perfectly! All I need now is a cool bath and a change of clothes, and, with your permission, I'll have them immediately. The clothes are in my sky horse. I'll see you at supper, perhaps? Well, then, *hasta la vista.*"

He turned his eyes again toward the tub. Vicente stood a few seconds frowning again, somewhat disconcerted and by no means pleased by the hint, the first in his spoiled life, that his royal presence could be dispensed with. Then, with a slight shrug, he sauntered doorward.

"Until supper," he said, and passed out.

McKay stood looking after him, a slight smile on his lips. Then he too stepped to the portal. For a moment he looked out. Then he closed the door and slid a hardwood bolt. When he turned back the smile had disappeared and his lips were thinned.

ALTHOUGH the plane now was under his own protection, guards had not been withdrawn. Two of them flanked his doorway; hard faced, cold eyed men whose alertness indicated that they had not stood long in the heat but had been very recently posted. And in their chill scrutiny was an expression he did not like, a hint of menace, coupled with a glint of mockery, which might or might not indicate personal hostility but could bode nothing good.

As he walked out to his plane he saw again, in memory, old Cononaco and his sign of the snake, heard again the low spoken counsel of Nuné. And, as he mounted his mechanical steed, opened a concealed hatch in its tail, and drew forth a narrow fiber case containing clothing and other personal effects, he determined to confer with that saturnine veteran at the first opportunity. The opportunity came surprisingly soon.

Returning to his bedroom, he opened the case, laid out fresh garments, undressed and strode toward his tub. At the entrance to the bathroom he stopped short. There, in the ornate hammock so recently empty, sat Cononaco.

Wordless, the old fellow met his astonished stare with an expression of amusement. Then his head tilted slightly toward the wall, outside which stood those unfriendly guards, perhaps able to hear, though not to see, whatever went on within. McKay nodded. Saying nothing, he advanced to the tub, immersed himself therein and bathed with plentiful splashing. Emerging, he toweled rapidly, while the observer surveyed his muscular physique with evident approval. Thereafter he stepped to the hammock and sat beside his welcome though uninvited visitor.

"How come you here, *capitán*?" he asked, *sotto voce.*

The wrinkle lidded eyes gleamed with pleasure at the title, so hard won and so long lost. A hoarse whisper replied—

"Cononaco hid beneath the bed."

The younger man glanced through the doorways at his wide, low legged bed and the deep shadow beneath.

"The workmen here were friends of yours, eh?" he surmised.

"It is so."

"And why did you do this?"

"To speak to Oom Keh alone."

"Well, we are alone. Speak on."

"*Bien.* The eyes of Oom Keh have looked on the glory of the king. The ears of Oom Keh have heard the words of smooth tongues. What have eyes and ears told the mind of Oom Keh?"

For answer, a tanned forefinger traced down one bare white thigh a wriggly line.

"It is good," approved Cononaco. "Oom Keh is no fool. Now if there are more things Oom Keh would know, let him ask."

"*Bien.* There are several things Oom Keh would ask of Cononaco." McKay

adopted the other's mode of speech almost unconsciously. "First, Cononaco has called this snaky king a Jivero. What did he mean by that?"

A twist of hatred and contempt curled the mouth of the ancient slayer of Jiveros. He spat on the ground. His reply, though, came in the same steady whisper.

"Cononaco speaks truth. The truth he now tells is a stink to his nose, but truth.

"CONONACO has said that in the old days the Jivero men were killed and their women and children were brought home as slaves. They worked on the plantations and about the houses. They were cattle. No man of the White Ones mated with them. As the Jivero children grew up they mated and had more children, but not so many as we, not enough to become dangerous in numbers.

"Among these sometimes was a girl shapely and handsome, and some of our young men would look at that one much. But it was the law of Ho Seh and of Ran that no man of the White Ones should take a girl of the Jiveros, under pain of death; the blood of the White Ones must be kept clean; there must be no mixing. And that law of the kings was kept until the time of Gerardo, the last king before this.

"Now Gerardo was a weak king, unlike all before him, and given to drink. And the drink turned his mind, and although he had fair queens on this rock he took a girl of the Jiveros to amuse him. And she had a son by him. And that son is Vicente. *Ai*, Oom Keh, that is our noble king, a half blood, a half son of the bloody savages who shrink the head, a bastard born of drink and foulness!"

He spat again. McKay stared.

"But had Gerardo no legitimate sons?" he probed.

"Aye. Three of them, one by each of his queens. Strong lads of the breed of real kings. But as they grew, and as Vicente also grew, one by one those three white princes sickened and died, and their mothers, too. But Vicente and his Jivero mother remained well and strong. Most strange, yes? Aye, most strange!"

"The Jiveros know the use of slow poisons, no doubt," dryly commented the listener.

"Without doubt, Oom Keh. And so Vicente became king. And with him came a foulness upon all the land. The clean blood of all Hoserán grows unclean because of him, for the old law no longer holds. Like his father before him, he amuses himself with girls of the Jiveros, though he keeps it secret, or thinks he does. But it is known. And what the king may do other men may do. Although no man of the White Ones has yet taken a Jivero woman for his wife, more than one takes such a one for a temporary concubine, and babes of mixed blood are born. And the king laughs.

"The strong body of Hoserán rots, the strong arm of Hoserán grows weak because the blood within it is polluted by the rottenness of its head. And in the end, Oom Keh, this Hoserán must perish! Hoserán and the kingdom of Oriente must die, cut down and stamped into the mud by its enemies because it is too weak to defend itself! Old Cononaco, who walked the war trails in his youth, knows what those enemies are—sharp eyed, sharp toothed, waiting, always waiting their time to swarm back and strike. And they will come as surely as the sun will set. There is only one course that can save us."

"And that is—"

"To cut off the rotten head and put in its place a clean one!"

The old eyes burned with sudden fierce fire. There was a silence. At length the American asked:

"Could that be done? If so, why is it not done?"

"It could be done, Oom Keh. The body of Hoserán still is strong, the arm swift, even though diseased. It can be made to strike—by the right head. But the right head has not yet been found."

ANOTHER pause. Then said McKay: "Today, Cononaco, there came to me a voice. The voice said that Nuné, queen of the great Rand, had been born

again; that in her veins now ran the blood of José and of Rand, the old kings. Was this a dream?"

"No dream, Oom Keh. Nuné lives again. The blood of Nuné is clean. The mind of Nuné is pure. By blood and by right Nuné has better claim to rule than Vicente. But Nuné is a woman. No woman has ruled the White Ones. The ruler of the White Ones must be a man. A man hard of hand, strong in fight, swift in punishment. To him the White Ones and their enemies yield respect. To no others!"

Slowly McKay nodded.

"If the White Ones are such men as they were in the time of my grandfathers, no woman could control them," he conceded. "But now here is another thing. The voice which came to me said Nuné was Queen of the Flame. What flame is that?"

"A flame that keeps her safe, Oom Keh, from Vicente and all men. A flame that began burning in the time of Gerardo and has burned ever since. A good flame then but an evil one now—"

"Evil?"

"Evil. But Nuné does not know its evil. To her and to all true White Ones it is a holy thing, a fire sacred to her fathers, the great kings of the old time. And she and her maidens who attend it are sacred because of it. The man who lays hand on the Maidens of the Flame or their queen, or even speaks a bad word to them, will be torn apart. Not even Vicente himself dares—"

He stopped short, glancing swiftly toward the wall. McKay had heard nothing from that direction; nor, listening intently, did he hear anything now. But after a moment of rigid attention Cononaco rose.

"Cononaco goes," he announced, lips barely moving. "Have care, Oom Keh. The two who now guard the front are friends of Yanga, whom you disgraced today. *Adios.*"

Silently he began limping away. McKay stood up and walked beside him.

"Come again," he whispered.

"Later," breathed the other.

"And say to Nuné that Oom Keh waits to see her once more."

A keen sidelong glance, a slight twitch of wrinkled lips, and the veteran turned toward the big dim room where stood the plane. Into its shadows he hobbled, to fade quickly from sight.

Wondering how he could leave the house unseen, but leaving that problem for the wily old fellow to solve, the tall sky man entered his bedroom. For a moment he stood looking at nothing, his brow furrowed. Then, with a wave of the hand, as if banishing thought, he glanced about for a light, found a palm oil lamp, lighted it and, whistling cheerfully, began to dress.

CHAPTER VIII

A TOKEN OF YANGA

MOONLIGHT silvered the mesa and the city of Hoserán; pale radiance of a broad celestial disk not yet a perfect circle, but lacking little of full maturity. Fitfully it shone, obscured now and again by some dense cloud which cast abroad all concealing gloom. Rain was in the sky—the night rain so frequent on the eastern side of the towering Andes—but the clouds bearing it had not yet consolidated for united action. Now they merely drifted about in lowering threat.

Down in the close packed city few lights glimmered in the recurrent dark. Here and there might be discerned a tiny yellowish dot betokening wakefulness in some little home; elsewhere all seemed asleep. Over most of the royal rock, too, ruled apparent somnolence. Perhaps, in some of the houses flanking the plaza, the absence of light served to cloak intrigue or assignation; but, if so, the blank walls and shut doors and windows revealed no sign of it. Only at the western end, where stood the outwardly plain but inwardly luxurious palace of the king, was sight or sound of unrestraint.

There burned tall lamps at the main portal; and over the broad roofs drifted

loud voices and laughter of men and women, snatches of inebriate song, or bursts of throbbing music, all emanating from some inner patio where, in the coolness of the open night air, a hilarious supper party still continued.

At length these merry sounds died out. Soon afterward appeared new lights at the entrance—bright hand lights borne by a pair of white clad manservants. These marched out and away toward the hangar house of McKay, walking with shortened stride but with military cadence. Behind them, with easy swing, ambled McKay himself, bare headed, dark clothed, white collared, bright eyed and manifestly exhilarated, but alert and steady. No king or grandee or other personage accompanied him homeward this time; for none of his recent tablemates was now in condition to walk unassisted.

King Vicente, in fact, was unable to walk at all. Overpowered suddenly by the wine he had drunk, he had lurched forward on his table and lapsed into stupor. His sycophants, although still able to maintain equilibrium as long as they retained their seats, were hardly capable of rising. One of them, attempting it, had toppled sidewise on his neighbor, and both had gone to the floor, there to squirm sluggishly a few times and then lie inert. It was at this point that McKay had made his exit, leaving his boon companions to the care of their feminine consorts, themselves far from sober.

Unlike the midday meal, this feast had not been for men alone. Each alternate guest at the great table had been a woman; and, although each of these was ostensibly the inamorata of the man beside her, it had been palpably plain that she was most interested in the stranger who once more sat beside the king.

Glances of assumed shyness, covert smiles, pretense of fear of their male partners, had given way to open flirtation and bold invitation in look and posture, while their presumptive escorts had remained incredibly blind to their coquetries. McKay in turn had smiled upon them all, lifted his glass to more than one, but never more than once to the same one, and, apparently, forgotten each as soon as he looked at the next. Then, with the appearance of nude dancing girls who performed with wild wantonness, he had openly dropped all of them from his mind.

"These are the beauties of my city, Meredito," the leering king had confidentially declared, glancing along the board. "If you can not find among them one who interests you—"

"Give me time, O King," laughed McKay. "You're showing me too many at once, and they dazzle me. Let's have another little drink."

He neglected to mention the facts that to his experienced eye each of the present beauties was discernibly of the professional type, that that type never intrigued him, and that he knew of another beauty on this rock who transcended them all. Also he forbore to call attention to the truth that most of the wine poured into his golden goblet was, as opportunity occurred, being repoured to the ground, rather than down his throat.

AND now, leaving behind him drunken men and chagrined women, he was chuckling as he stepped from the doorway. He had imbibed enough wine to fill blood and brain with a joyous glow; he had evaded entanglements and executed a strategic retreat in the confusion consequent on the collapse of the king. Except by the lamp bearers, who had attached themselves to him unbidden, or perhaps by previous bidding, his departure probably was hardly yet realized.

The evening had been decidedly interesting; now it was pleasant to forsake its dregs and feel the night wind on his brow; and soon he would be sound asleep. He glanced up at the sky, now deep darkened with a heavy cloud, drew a long breath of the damp air and lengthened his stride.

Then he checked. From the gloom at his right spoke a low voice—

"Oom Keh!"

The repressed tone was that of Cononaco.

"*Si?*" he quietly questioned.

"Wait in the house of the sky bird."

"*Bien.*"

Without further pause he followed his escorts, who continued their stolid march with no backward look. Queer old fellow, Cononaco. Did he never sleep? What was he up to now? Then came recollection of his own last words at their previous meeting, and a quick smile shot across his face. That message must have evoked a reply.

As the light bearers drew near his house he peered ahead, seeking guards. Perhaps at this hour they had been withdrawn. No, they had not. Steel glinted at the nearest corner, and a solid shape detached itself from the dense dark beneath the wide eave. At the same corner showed an evenescent gleam from another rifle barrel. The front of the house being empty, the watchmen previously on vigil there had joined their fellows at the ends of the hangar.

When the light made clear the face of the nearer man McKay noted that it was that of a stranger. The cold eyed friends of Yanga had gone off duty, perhaps, however, to resume post later, when McKay slept.

On the heels of that thought came another which cut a slight furrow between his brows. During their time of watching, with the house unlocked and occasional clouds smearing out the moon, there had been nothing to prevent those unfriendly sentinels from slyly entering and working some mischief, petty or serious, which, when detected, would logically be attributed to the men succeeding them. He would take a look around.

The escort proceeded to his door. One stopped. The other entered, ignited the wick of a wide hanging lamp in the bedroom and marched out, shutting the door firmly.

Outside sounded low voices in curt converse; one of the guards, probably, exchanging words with the royal underlings. Inside, McKay glanced over everything revealed by the light of the oil. All was as he had left it.

FROM a pocket he drew a small case containing a light battery, which he switched on. With this he walked into the room of the plane, where he conducted a short but inclusive inspection. Nothing had been touched. Back he went, shooting the ray perfunctorily about the bathroom, finding no change. Once more in his sleeping quarters, he stood quiet, quizzically eying the darkness beneath the bed.

"Down you go, old woman," he derisively told himself, stooping, "just to make sure there's no horrid man or mouse or— Judas!"

The ray of white light, sweeping through the dense shadow, had halted on a repulsive shape—a drab hued snake, motionless, but half coiled and ready; small, but unmistakably venomous. Beady eyed, blurry tongued, it lay fixedly watching.

For a moment McKay remained equally immobile, scowling at the deadly thing. Obviously it could not have been there when Cononaco lay in hiding that afternoon. It had come there, or been placed there, since that time; since McKay himself had left the house. Moreover, it lay just within the shadow cast by the bedside and within striking range of the spot where a man intending to sleep in that room would be most likely to stand barefoot a moment while opening the sheets. A remarkable coincidence, that. Peering more sharply, the beholder now perceived the reason for the position of the reptile at that precise place. It was tethered.

From its tail rose a thin, strong cord, evidently tied to the under part of the bed. Moving nearer, the observer saw that the palm fiber string pierced the slender caudal extremity, threading it through in inescapable leash. The schemer who had set the silent death here had taken no chances of its escape. On the other hand, he had made it easy to efface all evidence of his crime, if he had means of access to the house. If McKay himself did not kill the snake after it struck him a—futile but natural thing to do—the plotter could easily do it himself.

In either case, it would be the work of only an instant to remove the cord from his slain tool and crush the carcass so that all trace of the tail piercing would be obliterated. Then there would be nothing to prove that the reptile had not come here accidentally—hidden in a load of the building material, perhaps—or crept of its own volition through some unnoticed crevice at the ground level. Meanwhile the victim would have died in the agony of poison.

As McKay straightened up, a wave of wrath suffused his face and for a moment a baleful fire blazed in his eyes. He turned doorward, fists clenched. Then he stopped. The assassin who had set this trap was not now at hand, he felt sure. In all probability he would return later. Meanwhile another clandestine visitor was about to arrive.

After a second or two of thought and another look at the snake he walked back to the hangar.

THERE, in the dark, he waited for measureless minutes, alternately raging, listening and puzzling. From without came no noise. At length, not far from where he stood, an almost inaudible sound crept from one of the walls, a vague rustle and a slow, crawling scrape; then a faint creak, succeeded by virtual silence. Within the house now could be felt, rather than heard, rapid breathing. It slowed. Came then a hoarse whisper:

"Oom Keh!"

McKay shot his light at the voice. Cononaco, leaning on his stick, stood beside the wall, in which was visible no opening. With a grunt of surprise and distress he threw up a hand to shield his dazzled eyes. The ray switched from him, to creep slowly along the wall, then vanish.

"Here," responded McKay, low toned. "How did you pass that wall?"

"Hush!" bade the oldster. "Come to me."

Through the gloom McKay stepped carefully. When groping fingers touched flesh he stopped.

"How do you enter?" he asked again.

A slight chuckle sounded, followed by a satiric whisper:

"Does Oom Keh carry the lightning in his hand and yet fail to see a door? Heh-heh! But do not flash the lightning again to find it. The door is only a dog's door, made for an old dog named Cononaco, who crawls on his belly to pass through it. And none knows of it but that old dog and certain builders who made this house. Now come farther from the wall."

One of the knobby hands closed on McKay's arm, drawing him inward. The grasp was surprisingly strong. Aged and shrunken and crippled though he was, the old time warrior was by no means a weakling. As the sinewy fingers sank into his flesh the younger man involuntarily hardened his muscles in defensive response. Again sounded the quiet chuckle.

As they moved, two thoughts flitted through the Northerner's mind. First, that Cononaco, despite his self derogation, must hold considerable influence among some of his people to enable him to cause the construction of a masked entrance in a house meant to be impervious; second, that it was odd that he who had been so recklessly caustic in characterizing the king that morning should now have become so cautiously stealthy. The latter thought found voice.

"Why do you use a dog door, Cononaco, instead of the one made for men?"

"Because, Oom Keh, a dog may creep in where a man would be turned back. And where no man may enter, no learning can come. And the learning that comes unseen makes the learner all the more strong in his knowledge, because he then can act with wisdom which none knows him to have."

"True."

McKay pondered the rather enigmatic statement a second or two, sensing its general drift, but refraining from further question as to whither his secretly acquired knowledge might be expected to lead.

"Well, *amigo*, the sacred door which is supposed to admit no human visitors has

let in something else. Before we talk further, come and look at it."

He turned his companion toward the living quarters. Into the half lit dining room they trod, and on into the more brightly illuminated bedroom. The white ray darted again to the malignant creature in the shadow, which now had drawn itself into full coil.

"*Ahhk!*" snarled Cononaco, sudden fury in harsh voice and contorted face.

With a hobbling hop he advanced, stick gripped ready for a death blow; then he halted, peering at the picket cord, while the grim lines about his mouth deepened. A moment he stood muttering incoherently, savage rage in his tone. Then he turned hard eyes to McKay.

"Thus a fool kills himself!" he rasped. "The name of that fool is Yanga."

"And his friends?" McKay nodded sidewise toward the outer wall.

"They are the hands. The mind moving the hands is that of Yanga. Idiots!"

The old eyes went to the cane barrier and dwelt there, a bleak gleam in their depths. A wolfish smile grew and faded out. McKay, watching, waited. Presently Cononaco again met his gaze.

"Oom Keh went to the banquet of the king. Oom Keh would return drunk and clumsy, without eyes to look or brain to think. So thought the fools. How would Oom Keh teach those fools their folly?"

"Wait in the dark for them to return; then kill them."

"Ah! The hard old Oom Keh speaks again. Good! But there is a way better and easier. Let Oom Keh instead call the guard, show the snake, speak of Yanga. That is all. The matter will settle itself before the sun rises. While it settles, there is another thing for Oom Keh to do. Of that Cononaco will speak when Oom Keh comes again to the sky bird. Now Cononaco goes—to wait. Make haste. Time flies."

DECISIVELY, he limped away, vanishing toward the plane room. McKay looked after him, at the wall, at the snake. Then he pulled off coat and collar, unbuttoned his shirt, drew an arm from its sleeve and, having thus assumed the appearance of half readiness for bed, strode to the outer door and flung it open.

"*Soldados!*" he snapped.

From the darkness a few paces away answered a quick—

"*Señor?*"

"Come here!"

Scowling, puzzled, wary, a rifleman came into sight. With an imperious gesture McKay led him inward. By the time he again stood near his bed another guard had appeared on the heels of the first. Both stood under the lamp, closely regarding the disheveled foreigner who, plumbing their eyes in return, found there only a question.

"Is this the way you keep guard?"

The searchlight again revealed the lurking reptile. For a moment the couple stared. Then from both erupted an astounded grunt.

"While you protect my door this thing comes in here and ties its tail to my bed! A most remarkable thing for a snake to do, eh?" taunted McKay. "Did it ask your permission to enter?"

The two looked at each other, then at him, with manifest perturbation. One blurted—

"This thing did not come here since we took post!"

"No? That is what you say. But the snake itself spoke to me a minute ago, and it said its name was Yanga and you were its friends."

Again the sentries glanced at each other, mouths hardening. Then spoke the second man, bluntly—

"It lied!"

"So? Well, perhaps so. A forked tongue seldom speaks truth. But remember this, if any more such things come here you can explain to your king, who may not believe you as readily as I. Now kill it and take it out!"

At the snap of the command one lifted his gun. But the other interposed. Quick, guttural words tumbled from his mouth, and the rifle slowly sank. Thereupon the speaker turned to McKay.

"With permission, *capitán*, we will not kill it—yet. We can take it out alive. It will never trouble you again. Are we permitted?"

McKay eyed him, then nodded. The fellow's set lips betokened ill for somebody, but not for him.

More growling converse, and one dropped his gun butt before the snake, which promptly struck at it. The other darted his rifle barrel across the outstretched form and pressed down. Caught, the reptile wriggled uselessly while a hand closed behind its head. Then the cord was cut and the captor arose, holding the deadly creature with as little concern as if it were but a worm.

"*Buen 'noche,' señor.* Good night," he said. And out he marched.

The other, holding both rifles, hesitated, a pleading look on his expressive face.

"You have suffered no harm, *capitán*," he ventured. "You will say nothing?"

"Not unless further danger of the same sort comes."

"None will!"

With that promise and a look of relief, the sentinel followed his mate. The door shut. From without came a mumble of voices, increasingly wrathful, then subsiding to an almost inaudible mutter. McKay listened, then shrugged and readjusted his dangling shirtsleeve.

"Well, ye gods of chance," he softly soliloquized, "I don't know just what you're going to do about this, but it sounds like bad luck for somebody. And I don't know what you have in store for me and Cononaco either, but try to make it good, won't you? We're both deserving young fellows. And now let's see what's on Cononaco's mind at present."

And, pulling on his dark coat but leaving the white collar behind, he extinguished the light and felt his way back to the black room where waited the crafty old dog of the White Ones.

TO BE CONTINUED

HANK JOINS *the* VIJILUNTYS

Letters of a Wandering Partner

By ALAN LEMAY

Cheese Cloth, Black Hills,
Medjum Fall, 1878.

DEER BUG EYE,

Wel heer I am in the town of Cheese Cloth Bug Eye, and Cheese Cloth is in the tall timber, an the timber is in the mowntins, an all 3 is on Moose River, an it is a funy thing you do not seem to be abel to find any of them. I can not see that Cheese Cloth has changed much sinse I left to rescoo you frum the Soo Injuns Bg. Eye. Ther may be a few mor tin cans in the street, but that is all. An the town is stil ful of tents an felers lookin fer gold, or meenin to wen they get around to it.

As neer as I can make out you are stil lost in the woods Bug Eye. Littel good it done me to wip the entire Soo nashun in a heroic efert to save yer life. After I had ben to al that trubbel wat shoud I find but you had escaiped alredy without my help, an not ony that but made maters werse by losin yerself without leevin a trase. I mite jest as wel hav staid in Cheese Cloth, eetin an sleepin at my leezyer. I am getin gooden tird reskin my life to help you out an havin my eferts unapreeshated. An if you do not look out you wil soon find yerself fasin the werld singel handed, an a pore out you wil make of it then Bug Eye.

Wel I spose I wil have to hunt you up this Inst mor, an find out wat new trubbel you hav got yerself into now, an get you out of it. An wen I hav done that you wil eether hav to do beter or get a new pardner, that is finul.

Yr. Obeedint Servunt,

—HANK.

Cheese Cloth, Black Hills,
Follerin week.

DEER BUG EYE,

Stil no werd frum you Bug Eye, an my leters to you are pilin up until they are goin to hav to be sent by frate, if I dont pritty qwick find out ware you are at.

I dont noe wat this country is cumin to Bug Eye. The 1st thing I done wen I see you had went to werk an lost yerself in the woods was appeel to the guverment fer ade. Ther was a troop of cavelry campin alongside Cheese Cloth last week, an a fine bunch of helrazers they were Bug Eye, an I went strate to ther captin. At 1st they woud not let me see him, but I found out wich was his tent, an I went around anuther way an cum up behind an found the captin washin his sox. Wat is the mater with you, he sed. Ther aint nuthin the mater with me I sed, but ther is sevrel things rong with my pardner, an with that I cum strate to the point.

My pardner has got hisself lost in the woods I sed. I hav not even herd of him fer sum time, an I am afrade of fowl play. Heer is wat you do, I sed. You take this troop cavelry I sed an you skater them al over the hils, an you giv them no peese until they find my pardner Bug Eye. I advize you to hav them start at 1 end of the Black Hills an comb rite throo to the other end, I sed, an in that way you are bownd to find him sooner or later. I then giv him a compleet descripshun of you Bug Eye.

The captin stood an looked up at me, an I seen he was thinkin over my plan. Finly he sed, it seems to me by yer descripshun this heer Bug Eye pardner can not be much good. I sed you are rite, he is practicly useles, he is as no count a pardner as you are lible to run acros in meny a long day. Wel then he sed wy do you want peepul to go to so much trubbel to find him.

Wel sir that stumped me Bug Eye. I hummed an hawed an the captin sed you had beter go home an think up sum reesuns an cum back next munth. So I went back to Cheese Cloth Bug Eye an took up my posishun at 1 end of a bar in a sloon, an begun to think. It was a tuff problem al rite al rite an meny a man woud hav giv up. But finly I got a list of reesuns rote out wy shoud they serch fer you Bug Eye, as folers:

1st plase. I am a American sitizen, an I demand they do wat I say as a American sitizen.

2lly. You are a American sitizen Bug Eye, an hav a rite to militery perteckshun. Whoo noes but wat the Soo nashun has fergot the lesson I giv them Bug Eye, an you may now be holdin them off with yer bare hands. An it is the bizness of the U S army eether to proove you aynt or else hunt you up an find out, it is the leest they can do.

3lly. My father pays taxes same as anybudy else.

Wel Bug Eye, I sernly shoud hav ben a lawyer. Take a look at that 2nd point, it is practicly a masterpeese.

I took my list of reesuns an went back to the captins tent by the back way agen, an I found him sittin sleepin. I woke him up, an at 1st he ony cussed, but finly I got him to lissen. Did he at 1nst cal his cavelry together, Bg. Eye he did like hel.

He sed al rite I wil take it up with the secertary of war, cum back erly in the spring an I wil giv you ther anser. I sed I dont think Bug Eye can stand off the Injuns that long. He sed al rite, cum back any time you want to, but 1st get out of heer, Ime thinkin. I sed I wil be back tomorrer demandin a finul anser.

Wen I went back next mornin ther was a gard at the back of the tent as wel as at the frunt of the tent, an I coud not get in the camp an I coud not see the captin, an I coud not make any impreshun on any of them.

Wat kind of a guverment do you cal that Bug Eye, a man pays taxes fer yeers, or at leest woud pay taxes if he had anythin to pay taxes on, an the 1st thing he asks the guverment to do fer him they refoos him. Sum day I am goin to get even.

Meenwhile Bg. Eye I hav becum a very important sitizen in Cheese Cloth, an get a hi salry in a sloon. Heer is how I done it. In the 1st plase I found out that the rifel I took away frum the Injun woud not shoot fer sowr appels. So I took my 1st chans to trade it fer a capun ball

pistol. At 1st I coud not find any 1 to trade, but finly I found a feler sleepin off a drunk, an I got him partly waked up, an I yeled in his eer do you want to trade guns an hav a drink, an he sed shore. An he went back to sleep an we traded.

I then found me a big hors fly Bug Eye, I seeleckted a unussaly fine 1 frum amongst the meny flys we hav heer in Cheese Cloth. I rung his neck, an conseeled him in my hand, an went in a sloon. Evry budy terned around to see whoo cum in. I sed Gee look at that hooge horse fly flyin around heer, I wil shoot his wing off. *Bang*, I shot a smal hole in the canvas roof. Then I run an let on to pick up sumthin frum the flore, an shoed everbudy the fly in my hand. I made out I was descerijed an sed it is noe use, I cant shoot like I uster, heer I amed at his wing an ony manijed to shoot his hed off, I gess I am gettin old. Then I flang him down on the flore in disgust, an steped up to the bar. An al the felers picked up the remanes of the hors fly an past him frum hand to hand, an in 5 minnits I was a famus man.

The gambler that owns the sloon cum to me an took me to 1 side an sed yer shootin is pritty good fer a feler that closes both eyes, I seen you close both eyes. But I wil say you got mor nerve than any feler I ever saw, how woud you like a job. I sed I dont noe, is ther much work to this job. He sed no ther isunt any werk, you jest take these 2 sawn off shot guns an set on that hi box behind the faro deeler. We cal that the lookout chare, he sed. An if anybudy trys to get funy he sed I want you to rar up to yer ful hite an make a fase at him, that shoud put any ordnary feler out of bizness. An if that dont werk he sed wy shoot him, that is the ony way to handel sum of these felers, tho we want to keep away frum that as much as we can. An I sed al rite.

So now I am getin a $1 dolar a day an food, an get mornins off an wen I go out on the street al the felers nudje eech other an say look, ther he goes, the hooge jint that is in the lookout chare in the Red Tale sloon, do not get in his way, he is bad. An I am very much looked up to an respeckted Bug Eye. Aint that fittin.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,
—HANK.

Cheese Cloth, Black Hills,
Summers over, 1878.

DEER BUG EYE,

Hallyloogy Bug Eye I hav got werd of ware you are at. You are camp about 15 mile up the Moose river, or was wen last seen. You was lookin fer the town of Cheese Cloth, an goin the rong way. You wil say how do I noe. I noe becaus I hav talked to that feler you run across up on the Moose river, an both of you wanted to get to Cheese Cloth, but neether 1 of you new wich way to go, an the other feler gessed he woud go down streem an you gessed you woud go upstreem. Isunt that jest like you Bg. Eye. Giv you 2 ways to go, 1 rite way an 1 rong way, an I can tel wich 1 you are goin to pick evry time.

I expeck you wil recernize yer mistake soon Bug Eye an tern around an cum back. But if you do not show up by nex wk. I wil hire a feler to go after you with these leters explanin ware you made yer mistake. Unless you hav grately changed Bug Eye you are ony makin about 16 mile a day, an a fast feler wil cetch up to you in no time.

Watever you do Bug Eye, do not change yer mind, be shore to cum to Cheese Cloth. I am jest about runin Cheese Cloth, we wil hav everthin our own way. Jest the other day a feler was sayin Hank you are indoutedly the biggest man in Cheese Cloth an probly in the Black Hills, an we are thinkin very serusly of runin you fer guvner as soon as this country qwits bein a teritery an becums a state. That shows how I stand heer Bug Eye. Of corse I wil never be guvner becaus this wil never be a state. Sum felers think it wil be, but a foresited feller can eesy see that this wil always be a wilderness, ther is no use trine to make it anythin difrunt.

I started to tel you how I got to be the mane feller around heer Bug Eye. Wel

the other nite ther was a big meetin out in the timber neer Cheese Cloth, an we went to werk an ogrinized sum Vijiluntys. You wil say Hank wat in time is Vijiluntys. Wel Bug Eye as neer as I can make out Vijiluntys is sum of us fellers that is startin out to run Cheese Cloth to soot ourselfs, partly secrutly an partly by mane strenth.

I was out walkin in the timber after the faro game closed up, an I cum upon this meetin axidently, they seem to hav forgot to tel me it was goin to take plase. A feller name Dirty Neck was makin a speech. They do not cal him Dirty Neck becaus his neck looks that way, it is becaus he has ben seen to wash it neerly evry week, an fellers thout he must be pritty dirty or he woudunt be so much werk to hisself. An I stood on the edge of the croud lissenin to the speech Dirty Neck was makin.

He sed look at al the roberys we ben havin lately he sed. Fellers is robin fellers rite an left he sed. That is mebby alrite he sed, but wen they begin thinkin they got to kil a feller in order to rob him that is carrin a good thing too far. Ther is sum of us that is tird of bein robed an merdered he sed. I am not a extreemist, he sed, I do not ask that peepul show a respeck fer hooman life. But we got to draw the line sumplase he sed, an I figger it shoud be drawed befour they get to me. The hooman life I am usin is 1 hooman life they wil hav to leeve be, an if ther is any other fellers that feels the saim way I am with them, he sed. With that he gumped down off his stump Bug Eye.

Fellers al around me was ternin to eech other an sayin I dunno but wat ther is sumthin in wat he says.

A feller with a bald hed an red wiskers clumb up on the stump next an held up a bottel an sed if you are throo talkin about Vijiluntys I want to interdooce doctor Horris G. Watkins grate vejtibel remedy, the greatest medickle discuvry of the age, it is good fer— But he never got to say wat it was good fer, they siluntly hawled him off the stump an kiked him out of the croud. I was anksus to heer wat he had to say, I noe how intrusted you are in medisins Bug Eye. But I gess the rest of the fellers was not feelin porely, they did not seem intrusted.

A tal hansum feller with a busted nose got up next, his name is Hollerin Jones. He sed the hole trubbel around heer is crooked gamblers are runin this shebang. Wen he sed that, the fellers that hapened to be standin behine him imedjutly flang therselves to the ground, to be out of line of the bullits. But as luck woud hav it Bug Eye nobudy shot him, so he went on. He sed a crooked gambler cums in heer an he hires sum big plug ugly with guns an nives al over him to do his derty werk fer him, an he begins cheetin everbudy out of ther muny, he sed. An as soon as they find they hav things ther own way they begin getin funy he sed an do wat they feel like, an if they want the shoes off a mans feet, wy they hav him shot an take them he sed. We wil never get no plase he sed until we hav sistimaticly shot the theeves an merderers around heer. An the sooner we begin the beter he sed.

Wel Bug Eye difrunt felers got up an sed difrunt things, an sum sed if we start trubbel we wil get wipped, they are too strong fer us, an sum sed in this country the majority is always rite, an the majority heer is crooked, so robin an merderin must be rite it stands to reesun, an sum sed I do not want to get kilt by no gambler no matter wat the law says, I meen to liv a peeseful life if I hav to becum a outlaw to do it, an sum sed this an sum sed that, an I see they needed a leeder, so I pushed to the frunt.

At 1st they was not goin to let me get up on the stump, but as soon as I got ware they coud see I had my sawn off shot guns stuck in my belt they becum silunt. Wel I made a long speech Bug Eye. I woud like to tel you wat al I sed but I am onable. It is a funny thing Bug Eye, as soon as I get up to make a publick speech my mind becums perfeckly blank, an I cant remember afterward wat it was I sed. But it was a grate speech, it lasted

anyway a hour, an you coud see evrybudy was grately impressed.

Then I got down frum the stump an cum back to the Red Tale sloon leevin them to talk over wat I had sed amongst therselfs.

So cum to Cheese Cloth at 1nst Bug Eye we are goin to hav the best town in the Black Hills, an we wil mebby start a gamblin house of our own an run al the rest out. They are crooked an onsafe, it is about the leest a patriotic feller can do Bug Eye, run them al out. Hury Bug Eye, I may need yer help.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,
—HANK.

4 hrs. later.

DEER BUG EYE

The darndest thing I ever herd tel of has hapen Bug Eye, I never see the like in al my life, an it jest goes to show ther is no gratitood in this werld Bug Eye or saifty eether, I dont noe wat to think.

About a hour after I got back to the Red Tale sloon the croud had pritty wel thinned out fer the nite. It was pritty neer mornin an I mopped off the bar an stretched out on it fer a littel much needed rest. Sudinly ther was a loud noise, an a sound of sumbudy shootin al the bottels off the back bar, an I got up an terned up the lamp an nobudy was thare. This is very mysterus I sed to myself. Jest then I notised that sumbudy had gone to werk an pinned a letter to the frunt of my shert. Heer is the leter Bug Eye, wen you hav red it you can tare it up, I dont want it any more.

WARNING.

To Hank ——, alias the Hoosier Giant, lookout chair in the Red Tail Saloon, lately robber of the Deadwood Coach.

This is to notify you that we know who you are, that you are not wanted here. We give you 45 minutes to clear out. If we find you here 45 minutes from now we will give you 1 minute start, & if we catch you after that we will make an example of you on the nearest tree. Also collect the reward on your head. We mean business.

—VIGILANTE COMMITTEE.

Bug Eye that jest goes to show how much a feller is apreeshated in this country. Heer I tern to an werk like time getin up a Vijilunts an wat is the 1st thing they do. Tern on me. I hav a grate noshun to make a exampel of the entire town. But wat can I do Bug Eye. I hav serched the entire sloon, an I cannot find my shot guns or anybudy elses. Wat do they think I am goin to shoot with I woud like to noe.

Ther is ony 1 thing left fer me to think Bug Eye, an that is that the hole thing is ment to be a goke. How can the Vijiluntys run me out of town wen I am presidunt of the Vijiluntys. The best thing I can do is ignore the hole afare, it is beneeth my dignuty.

They are a ignernt lot, I woud not put it past them to rowt a feller rite out of a sound sleep, an it may even be that they meen wat they sed. Wel it is ther own hard luck Bug Eye. If werse cums to werse I wil take my 1 minnit start, 1 minnit is plenty fer a determin man.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,
—HANK.

Up at the foot of Old Baldy,
Medium Fall 1878.

DEER BUG EYE,

I am in the soop now Bug Eye an never hav I see anythin ½ so tiresome. Wen I cum heer last nite, littel did I think I was goin to stop heer, an not be abel to get back out eether. It is entirly the result of bein in a hury Bug Eye, an I blame no 1 exsep my self.

The Vijiluntys rowted me out of Cheese Cloth, like I told you they probly woud befour, I want you to continly notis Bug Eye that I am neerly always rite. They giv me a verry scant ½ minnit start, an I went wooping it down the rode, an heer they cum. They was on horses an I was afoot, an ther we went, me longin fer Wilber an them jest about holdin ther own. An finly I got winded, an terned off the trale, an they went past.

As soon as I thout they had al gone past I took to the rode agen an comensed runin, but mor gradjilly this time, to save my breth. I was not goin to stay in the nayberhood of Cheese Cloth Bug Eye,

Cheese Cloth fellers hav not got good sense, it is not safe to be amongst them. So I chased on down the rode after my persooers. If my persooers was ahed of me insted of behind like they ment, that was ther lookout, not mine, aint that wat you say Bug Eye.

Al went wel fer a wile, then I herd sum mor horses cumin behind me. An wile I was listenin to them, wat did I do but run around a tern of the trale, smack into the persooers ahed of me, ware they had stoped to argy about wich way had I went. It was 1 of the foolishest things I hav ever done Bug Eye, an a grate mistake.

As soon as they see me they let out a grate yel, an ther was horses cumin at me both ways an also lowd shootin. I was forsed to take to the timber agen, with the town of Cheese Cloth crashin after me, an they hung on an hung on til I never see the like, an wen finly I stumbeld upon the bottom of a rok slide I was good an glad to rosh up it, ware the horses coudunt cum. An finly I wound up in the crotch of a bluff at the top of the rok slide, an ther I set down to wate fer mornin. Shore enuf, presently it cum Bug Eye, an woud you look wat a sad site was reveeled.

½ the fellers frum Cheese Cloth was camp at the foot of the rok slide about a ¼ mile down frum ware I am at. They was even cookin breckfus in plane site, an sendin up the most deelishus smels I ever see. It made me furus Bug Eye but ther was nuthin I coud do. I am practicly up a blind gully, I do not noe wat wil becum of me. I can wip the entire town of Cheese Cloth if I hav to. But I sernly dont like the idee of roshin down that ¼ mile of rok slide under gun fire, those fellers can ony shoot at a man jest about so long befour they hit him.

Wile they camly eet breckfus I bilt me a kind of fort out of hooge roks, to ward off most of the bulits, an set down to think, but without an speshul effeck. An after breckfus heer they cum. Wel sir Bug Eye ther begun the most pecooler 1 side battel you ever see. I coud not even stick up my hed to see ware they was at, evry time I tride to take a look about 6 teen guns shot off an wel did I noe whoo they was pointin at. An al of them cum roshin up the rok slide, slipin an scramblin, it sounded very much to me like sum kind of a foot race to see whoo was goin to capcher me an colleck the reward.

An ther I set Bug Eye with out arms or ammynishun, an they new it too. Finly I picked up a arm load of medjum size roks, about the size of hams, an begin lettin fly. I coud not see wat I was throein at, but they was pritty close by then, an I coud cum pritty close to telin how good I was throein by the remarks they begun makin.

Pritty soon I herd 1 or 2 wile yels of pane, an wen I looked over the top the fellers was al roshin down the rok slide agen. I had got 2 or 3 of them Bug Eye, they was glad to be abel to drag therselfs slowly off, I coud hav beened them eesy enuf. But I am a broad minded man, I let them get away, an hope it wil be a lesson.

Since then they hav rosh me 4 or 5 times, an I hav got rok throein by eer pritty neer down to a sistum. Wen I heer a distunt voice sayin, Hell, Bill look at the size uv that rok, I noe I hav fell a littel short. If I heer sum 1 sayin Great gosh, the big moos can heeve a rok a mile, I noe I hav over shot. Wen I heer them begin sayin Wat the hell heer, an Gosh amighty, I noe I got jest about the rite range, an I keep heevin roks about that distunce in al derecshuns.

An that is the way it went al mornin Bug Eye, evry time heer they cum I opened fire with roks about the size of yer hed, an mebbe you think the roks wasunt flyin. I hav this advantije Bug Eye, I can loop up a rock frum behind the wall I hav bilt without any danger of getin shot, wareas they noe they are like to get kilt any minnit. An it aint any use ther trine to sneek up hidin behind big bolders, a rok that is landin on you frum above dont care wether you are behind sumthin or not, in fack it never noes the diffrunts.

The last time I stampeded my persecooters Bug Eye they started a littel rok slide of ther own account as they run down, an I am by no meens shore that ½ dozen of them did not get berried in it. You can eesy see wat I meen wen I say this heer is a 1 sided battel, I am havin al the best of it. Sinse the rok slide they hav not made any mor foolish mooves. They seem to hav started sum poker games down ther, like as if they aim to starve me out. Al rite let them, if I am forsed to cum down ther with a armlode of my roks they wil doutless overcum me, but meny of them wil be sory 1st.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,

—HANK.

P S I am usin 3 sizes of roks Bug Eye. No. 1—Medjum size, about the size of a mans hed. Fer sendin fellers back down the mowntin awoopin wen they cum up heer shootin at me. No. 2—Large size, about as big as a nale keg. Fer usin at close range. So far they hav not cum into close range, an I am glad of it, I do not want to use them big 1s if I can help it. The trooth is I am kind of afrade to throe them things Bug Eye. 1 of them is lible to start the hole rok slide slidin, whoo noes, an ware woud I be if my rok slide slid out frum under me, anser that 1 Bug Eye. No. 3—Smal size. Fer remindin the fellers down ther that I am still alive an kikin. This is a verry useful size Bug Eye, about as big as yer fist. Wen you throe them down hil they go leepin an bounsin, cleer to the foot of the rock slide an on down the mowntin, they never do stop until they go bustin into the timber. I hav alreddy nocked a kettel off a fire an beened a mule with this size rock, ¼ mile away. Good throein Bug Eye. But of corse it was on the bounse. 1 result is that they hav mooved ther poker games to a respeckful distunce, about ½ mile. Ony a few fellers are watchin down ther at the foot of the rock slide, an them constanly reddy to dodje.

I wanted to tel you about the use of roks in detale Bug Eye, you may soon find yerself in a like perdicment an not noe wat to do, so I thout I beter explane how to handel it. Jest remember that ther is werse weepons than throein roks Bug Eye.

Evenin.

No beter off.

DEER BUG EYE,

A pecooler thing has hapened. I hardly noe wat to think. I told you about how I am backed up in the fork of a cliff an cant get out. Wel a littel wile ago ther cum a scratchin an a scufflin up ther sumplase above the bulje of the cliff, an diffrunt size roks begun tumblin down, an gravel, an a old tin can, an I dont noe wat all, but the best was to cum, wat do you think. Heer cum a burro alive an kikin end over end an lit on his back rite beside me, bam.

He got up an shook hisself, an took a look around an looked serprised, an then went rite to werk restin agen, like he had probly ben doin up above wen his footin giv way. You woud think it woud hav kilt him Bug Eye but no. It jest goes to show you cannot kil them things, not with a ax. I wil bet he woud not of noen he had fel, exsep that wen he looked around he seen he was in new seroundins.

He had had a pack on Bug Eye, but ther was nuthin left of it exsep a pick ax an a shovel, 2 artickles of abslutly no use to me. I am hopin that ther was also grub in the pack, an that it got nocked off in the roks wen he was falin over the cliff, an that sum of it wil gradjilly fall down later. But if it dont, I feel sory fer the burro, but a man has got to liv sum way.

It is my bleef Bug Eye that this animle belongs to sumbudy, sumbudy that was monkeyin around up on the top of the cliff. Of corse he was lookin fer gold, that is wat everbudy is doin. An it is not serprisin the burro had a pick an shovel, with morn a 1000 fellers huntin gold you can eesy figger that 2 or 3 out of evry 100 wil hav sense enuff to bring along a pick an shovel.

I stil do not noe wat I am goin to drink.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,

—HANK.

P S I hav tooken a finul count jest befour it was dark Bug Eye an I find that most al the fellers hav giv up ketchin me as a bad job. Ther is stil mebby 20 or 30 fellers left down ther, but I think that by the time the burro is finish I wil be abel to moove out of heer like a peesabul man.

Middel of the nite,
Saim plase.

DEER BUG EYE,

I hav desided not to eet the burro after al, I hav a beter plan.

This plan is of extreemly desprit caricter Bug Eye, I do not noe if it wil werk, if it does not werk yer pardner is probly a ded man, wasted away with starvashun. I hav not eet sinse I do not remember wen Bug Eye, an if I had a lookin glass I woud be afrade to look in it. The burro mite be a meens of savin my life if I eet him, but I hav bravely desided to fritter him away trine to escaip.

I hav not time to tel you wat the plan is Bug Eye, I hav to cary it out wile it is stil dark, an I do not noe how neer mornin it alredy is. You noe I can ordinarly tel time by the stars, an noe ½ of the stars by name an posishun. But this darn cliff shuts off the ½ of the stars that I hapen to noe, al the stars I can see seem to be sprinkled up ther jest any old way, a man cant tel anythin by them.

But anyway Bug Eye, I am ritin this in hopes you wil get it sum way if I fale, an be abel to tel the peepul back in Single Tree Indianna that Henry Clay Montgomery died ded game of starvashun, a credit to his home state.

Wel heer I go Bug Eye.

Yr. Obeedint Servant,
—HANK.

Middel of the follerin
mornin, Same darn plase.

DEER BUG EYE,

It is al over Bug Eye, yore pore pardner is a doomed man. Nuthin remanes but to set heer starvin an watin fer them fellers to go on home an leeve me be. Sumtimes I think I wil starve 1st, an sumtimes I think mebby they wil go away in time. But anyway I wil rite this heer 1 more leter befour my strenth leeves me, an then watever hapens the werld wil noe the werst.

After I rote to you last nite I set to werk to 1nst carin out my desprit plan. An wen you heer wat it was I bet you wil say it was a good plan an shoud hav werked. An you wil be sory you did not come to the ade of yore pore pardner wile ther was yet time, you wil never get anuther pardner anythin like me Bug Eye I giv you my werd.

1st I throed that darn burro, the plan was based on him Bug Eye, an he was its 1 week link. If he had of had any sense I woud be a free an hapy man today. After I throed him I held him down with 1 hand an took off my shert an tore it in 2 peeses, an muffled up his frunt feet so he woud not make any tracks with them. Then I took off my boots Bug Eye an put them on the hind feet of the burro. An then it seemed fer a wile as if ther wasunt goin to be any way to werk it after all, the boots woud not stay on his feet. I tride rigin suspenders, but they slid rite off his hine end, an I tride tyin them to the pack saddel, but then he coudunt walk good, but jest stood ther kikin with a expreshun on his fase as foolish as ever I see. I tride this an I tride that, an wen finly I got the boots to stay on his feet fer a minnit he ony stumbled over them, he did not hav enuf branes to pick up his feet.

Finly I put the boots on his frunt feet an the padin on his hind feet, an he seemed to get along much better. An with suspenders over his withers the boots staid on good, anyway as good as you coud expeck. I seen at 1nst that he was goin to make the most suspishusest trale you ever see, becaus sumtimes the boots terned in pidjun toed, an sumtimes the toes pointed pritty neer strate out on eech side, so you woud think wat kind of crazy man made these tracks anyway. But I sed to myself I gess they wil hav to do.

Finly I had him al fixed up, an I took him down the rok slide as far as I dast, an trun him loose, an heeved a number of

rocks after him (No. 3 size) to keep him goin. An he went trottin away, down throo the plase ware my persecooters was camped Bug Eye.

Wel Bg. Eye I went back up to my fort to wait until mornin. Presuntly it cum, an I watched the fellers down ther fer sines of life. 1 of them was sittin smokin with a rifel, an watchin the plase ware I am. The others was sleepin. I seen rite away that most of them had left, ony about 8 was stil holdin out to cetch me an get the reward. But them 8 was the tuffest fellers in Cheese Cloth, woudunt you noe it Bug Eye.

Finly they begin to get up an stretch an argy whoos tern it was to get breckfus, anyway that was how it looked frum ware I am. An pritty soon 1 of them went over to ware the ashes of the fire was, an I see rite away they had found the boot tracks the burro had made. Al the felers cum on the run, an waved ther arms an argyed; an pritty soon they al took off after the burro. Wen they cum to the muddy plase ware the critter had crossed the crick they was a comickle site, I spose the tracks had tern pidjun toed or sumthin, anyway they argyed a long time befour they went on, 3 or 4 of them bendin down over the trale an the others follerin along behind.

Al was goin wel Bug Eye wen sudinly I see a site that made my blud run cold. Ther in the distunce down the mowntin I see that fool burro, standin ther jest as if a mans life wasunt at steak. He was standin gnee deep in gras, so my persecooters had not seen he was the 1 warin the boots. But you coud see that they woud soon cetch up to him, an the game woud be up.

Heer I had ben hopin al the time that the burro an my boots woud leed them fellers a long chase in the timber. An wen they was al out of site I was goin to rosh down an get me a good horse an saddel an sum grub an make my escape. I noe that woud be steelin, but steelin is beter than bein ded an beryed, I leeve it to any reesabul man.

Wel Bug Eye wen I see that it was not going to werk I pritty neer cried. An I coud see that the ony hope was to rosh down the mowntin an get away as best I coud befour they got to the burro. If they terned around an seen me I new it was al over, but that was the ony hope. So down I went, hurrin to beet the cards.

Wen I was about ½ way down the rock slide my luck giv out at last Bug Eye, the rock slide begun to slip an terned into a regler avylanch, an I rode down to the foot on top of 15 or 20 ton of roks, an the fellers that is after me terned around an seen me, an cum roshin back, sum of them shootin on the run, an it was al I coud do to get back up the rok slide an get sum roks up in front of me agen, an I didunt even get a chanst to grab a armlode of grub, most of the grub the fellers had was snoed under by the avylanch Bug Eye.

So heer I set starvin an watin fer the fellers to go away. An I got no shert an no boots, an my eetin burro is gone past recuvry, an I am so dry I can't spit. In fack I am sloely perishin Bug Eye. If you had any gumpshun you woud hav looked up yer pore pardner befour now, same as I did fer you, or pritty neerly, wen you was watin to be hung in the Peg Leg jale. You mite at leest be abel to lower me down a few finil bushels of grub frum the top of the bluff, to kind of solis my last moments. But no Bug Eye, I spose you are goin about yer bizness a carefree man, littel carrin wat has becum of the best pardner ever a man had. Al rite fer you Bug Eye. If ever I get out of this alive I wil make you swet, you mark my werds.

Yr. Obeedint servant,
—HANK.

P S Ferthermor I blame this hole afare on you Bug Eye, an I hope these heer last werds follers you to yer dyin day. An I hope they wil not hav to foller you far at that. Gosh but you are a faleyer, I never see the beet of you.

Darn.

WHICH WAY IS THE WAGON?

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

"Which way is the wagon?" is an old hail in the cattle country, and it means a lot to a chap who hasn't connected up with his wagon for a while.

SURE I remember how it feels
To follow that ramblin' home on wheels,
Rockin' along to the camp ahead;
The old chuck wagon was board and bed;
The cowhide saggin' with plenty wood,
The leaders and wheelers goin' good,
Then the evenin' shadow, the beddin' ground,
And the nighthawk singin' his lonely round,
And a flickerin' light on the wagon tire,
Some laughin' and talkin' around the fire . . .
But things have got shifted a lot, somehow.
I wonder which way is the wagon, now?

Sure I remember how it feels
To be hungry clean to my wore-down heels,
Our wagon bogged in the shiftin' sand,
And a-waitin' there to be drug to land;
With the cook a-cussin' his mule team blue,
And the wrangler helpin' him all he knew,
While the outfit was wonderin' what in hell
Was delayin' our cockeyed old hotel;
The wind a-moanin', the night plumb black,
And nary a sign of a wagon track,
And somebody callin' acrost the flat . . .
"Say, fellers, which way is the wagon at?"

Sure I remember the heat and dust,
The life we fancied, and likewise cussed;
Rain on our slickers rattlin' down,
Pistols poppin' and fun in town,
Whistlin' ropes and the snort and stamp
Of broncs in the early mornin' camp,
And dreams while ridin' my round alone,
Of Cheyenne, Laramie, San Antone . . .
Always a-driftin' here and there,
And arrivin', mostly, not anywhere.
The trail is turned under by hoe and plow,
And I wonder, which way is the wagon, now?

The BLOODY DECKS *of* EVERY

A swashbuckling yarn of the plunderers of the Spanish Main and a pirate who would be king

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

CHAPTER I

I WALK THE PLANK

EVEN men to whom murder is a pleasure, to whom blood is a thing sought after and enjoyed, may tire of their pleasure and amusement. Certainly, this day the crew of the *Fancy* had brought out all the fine points of cleverly inflicted death; but they had been at it all afternoon and evening.

I was the last—I only remained alive, and pitiless death fronted me, and the plank. No wonder, then, that the howling mob had quieted with liquor, satiated with the agony and fear of their victims. Behind me was only a quartet of the rascals, and they had the bored air of performing a final duty before joining their carousing comrades in the waist.

"Will 'un join?" asked one.

"In hell first," I muttered, and they went on with the business.

All this, too, may explain why my wrists were knotted behind with spunyarn rather than with hard cord. Perhaps this is why the bandage over my eyes was so carelessly adjusted. By squinting down, I could see my own bare toes; and the red tropic sunset seeped in around the edges of the cloth. I considered whimsically that the daylight had sucked up some of the blood so plentifully spilled that terrible afternoon.

How I wanted to see that sunset! In all my twenty-five years I could not recall that I had deliberately watched the set of sun—although, accustomed as I was to the clink of gaming coin, the slap of tankards, and loud tavern oaths, I had often enough seen it rise. All I had this day heard and seen had left my brain numbed, so the thought of death itself held scant interest. Now, as I stood waiting, I recalled how the man called Perch had bandaged my eyes with rags, and how I had noticed the reds and purples over there where the sun was settling into the Guinea Sea. And, even as the bandage came down, I had fancied a deepening of the shades and a shift in the metallic clouds. I wanted to see it all work out—wanted most desperately to see it, now that I was walking the plank, in the last moment of life!

They roughly hoisted me to the plank lashed there, where many a man had walked to death before me. And with

this I became conscious of more physical things. Desires are like to vanish swiftly under a half inch of cutlas sunk repeatedly into the buttocks. The problem of maintaining my balance on an elastic length of wood with a slippery surface crowded out all other thoughts. I knew the board was scarce half a rod in length, and its ending would come all too soon—especially as Perch's cutlas gave me no time to loiter.

At least the poorly adjusted blind helped me, kept me from stumbling and pitching awkwardly into the water, as I had seen my own father do that day. The nightmare of impressions driven and seared into my brain during the recent hours did not keep me from watching my footing most carefully. When under the bandage I saw the outer edge of the bending plank, I was poised and ready.

So I leaped into eternity.

I struck the water feet on, and sank. The air in my lungs, sucked in as I touched, pushed against the walls of my breast, the drums of my ears, the bones of my temples. Here where the Niger meets the ocean there are no shallows, yet I thought sure I must strike bottom. I could feel the water rush by as I drove down and down. The air imprisoned within me began to trickle through my nostrils, then the descent eased, and for an instant I hung motionless in the depths ere the slow upward plunge began.

Head flung back, mouth uppermost to gulp the first possible measure of air, I slid upward. Now I thanked the brutality which had stripped me of clothes, sending me stark naked into the ocean, yet with unbound feet. I kicked out, but even this exertion forced my lungs to gulp in a bitter draught. Strangled, I gave up to despair. Dim grayness closed down my mind and I felt the futility of further exertion. If I came to the surface they would pistol me—then better to die here in the warm depths!

I had gathered speed. Now my upturned face came suddenly, cruelly, against the ship's bottom. Barnacles

gouged my lips and nose and shoulder skin. The crash broke the tension; instinctively I swallowed, inhaled the salt water, went into a furious and terrible spasmodic effort to gain freedom. Afterward I found raw cuts on my wrists where the spunyarn parted under this convulsive effort.

Yet it parted! And now I felt the breath of the soft wind on my upturned face. I had slid along the stern bilge and reached the surface. Clinging there to the copper strip, where the sheathing came up to the stern planks, I gasped and retched alternately. It seemed I had been down for an hour. Yet, as I turned face to light, I saw that the colors and configurations in the west had scarce changed since I last looked upon them. Off in the face of the sun I made out a tiny speck. Whether the highland of some offshore island, or the maintop of another ship, I neither knew nor cared at the moment.

None of those aboard the *Fancy* were on the lookout for me. I could dimly hear the drunken reveling of the crew; from the stern windows of the cabin above I caught the murmur of voices in ordinary conversation. For perhaps five minutes I clung there, freeing my stomach from water and listening to the queer rattle in my own lungs where air and liquid mingled.

I had won at least a temporary respite, and my first thought was to find a more secure position. This was not difficult. Barely ten feet away I saw the sternpost and rudderhead; I did not even have to swim the distance, for a moulding along the finely decorated stern of the *Fancy* gave me good purchase. Presently I was securely wedged against the sternpost with one arm slung fairly comfortably over the top of the rudder. The position was bearable; and with only my head and shoulders above water, the cabin and poop overhanging above, I was secure from observation.

Thus placed, I could look directly at the sun, now losing itself in the horizon clouds over the Atlantic. I fancied the speck already noticed had grown larger and was taking on the vague outline of a ship heading for the *Fancy;* but there was no indication that she had been sighted from the latter's deck, and night was falling fast.

About me in the pale pinkish light were revealed grotesque and ghastly souvenirs of the day's business. More than one face of a former shipmate stared at me with unseeing eyes as it drifted past, and once came a twisted shape I thought certain was my father; but here courage failed me, and I closed my eyes to the sight. Wreckage still littered the sea, though hours had passed since the *Lisbon* went to the bottom; off to the westward I saw another clump of flotsam representing all that was left of the *James.*

As my mind cleared, I began to reconstruct the day's events; I was in an ideal situation to rehearse them, and if I ever again debarked in the Yard of the Company, I must be sure of the details in consecutive order. My brain worked back and back, as I hung there, clinging in the soft rush of water as the calm night drifted down.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING TO LIVE FOR

MY GRANDFATHER, Elias Willingham, had founded the Calicut factory. His father, a merchant of the Steelyard, was mentioned on the original charter of the Company of Governors and Merchants for Trading with the East Indies. My father was a governor of the company, a shareholder, a barrister who handled its affairs.

At sixteen I was at sea with Nathan Kimbark, who guided the old *Neptune* between the Thames and the Ganges for forty years. After I came down from Cambridge I touched the sea again and its taverns and wicked ways, and learned self reliance along with navigation and other things. I held apart from the Company, not wishing to seek place through favor, and won my own way. It was a rough way enough, for I had my grandfather's nature and was not given to politeness where sword or fists would serve me better. I fancy they all said that Ralph Willingham had gone to the devil.

Then, one night at my father's house, I met Ezra Dane and his daughter Anthea; he was going out to Calicut next day as factor, taking Anthea with him. It would hardly be fair to say that I lost my head, but before his ship was gone down-river I had applied for a position in the Company. The governors, with many misgivings, gave me a place in the Yard, and I straightway astonished them; discipline and application took the place of carousing and hot tavern gaming. I was working for Anthea, as I had seen her last, with the sunlight streaming down from behind and holding her in a golden frame from gilded copper tresses to little shoes.

So there was a good roisterer spoiled, and when Mr. Dane wrote for a new assistant at the Calicut factory I applied for it and had it. In this year of 1694 the Company's affairs were at low ebb, and a new fleet was being acquired; my father went to Cadiz, bought the *Lisbon* there, and I went out with her crew to sail her to Calicut.

Being prescribed sea air, my father sailed in her also, and we went out of Cadiz Bay on a March morning of 1694, with the little green island of De Leon drifting past on our larboard.

A week saw us at Santa Cruz in the Canaries, and with my father I accompanied Captain Stanwix on his visit to the governor. We climbed from our boat to the narrow, towering wharf above, and set off up the streets to the governor's house, a one story building set flush with the flag paved roadway.

In a park behind, while the spring sun warmed us, we sat under the house wall and drank clear pale wine out of tall goblets. The governor seemed much excited and ill at ease, and when the compliments and healths were done he plumped out a question whether we knew an English mariner named Captain Henry Every. At the name, Captain Stanwix frowned.

"Every? I remember a Henry Every who was mate on the *Unicorn* when we met that ship at Kingstown. Eh? You know him?"

He looked at me, as did my father, and I nodded.

"You remember Dick Brandon, whose father runs the alehouse at the Yard gate, and who went to sea a year or two ago?"

"I remember the rogue—he deserved Tyburn," said my father shortly.

I grinned.

"Aye. He shipped under a Captain Every. Their ship was one of a squadron under Sir James Houblon, hired by the Spanish to stop the French smuggling between Madeira and Corunna."

"And now a rank pirate," broke out the governor, who spoke good English. "Not a filibuster, but a pirate, by Santiago! He was in port here with three ships last month—landed a hundred men of a Sunday morning, seized the priests, seized my house and me, seized twenty young girls of the city and demanded a ransom of five thousand English pounds. And, by Santiago, he got it!" added the governor, his swarthy face dark with rage. "They sailed away, taking the girls with them and leaving this paper on the church door."

He took a torn paper from his pocket and handed it to us. The thing stuck against my mind like a picture. I can see it now in all its quaint wording:

> Feb. 28, 1694. To all English commanders lett This Satisfy: that I was riding here at this Instant in ye ship *Fancy* man of Warr formerly of ye Spanish Expedition who departed from Croniæ a month gone; Being and Am Now 3 ships of 46, 30 & 20 guns, 250 men, Bound to seek our Fortunes. I have never as yett Wronged any English or Dutch nor never Intend whilst I am Commander. Wherefore as I commonly speak with all ships I desire whoever Comes to ye perusal of this to take this signall that if you or aney whome you may inform are desirous to know wht we are att a Distance then make you Antient up in a Bale or Bundle and hoist him at Mizzon pekk, ye Mizzon being furled. I shall answer with yesame and Never Molest you; for my men are hungry Stout and Resolute, and should they Exceed my Desire I cannot help myself.
>
> As yett An Englishman's friend,
>
> —HENRY EVERY
>
> Here is 160 french armed men now at Isle of May who wait for opportunity of getting aney ship, take Care of yourselves.

SO MUCH for the incident; we drove on toward Cape Verde, half amused by Every's effrontery. He caused us no worry. All Company men held deeper loyalty toward the Company than for the country under which it was chartered, and Every must have had this loyalty ingrained. He was most unlikely to attack a Company ship—and if he did, we were ready for him.

Yet all the while, there in the purple reaches of the horizon, sped the *Fancy* and the *James* and the *Charles*, and when the calm came down upon us it descended upon them also, and for a week we had prodigious hauling and shifting of sails but little progress. When the wind did come, it was out of the west, and at length we rounded the cape and headed for the equator and the southern tip of Africa far beyond.

Then storm, sharp and furious, two full blustery days of it; and the yellow sun of the third dawn found us with the mizzen gone, a weary crew in a weary ship slowly climbing up and sliding down the waves that slipped under our keel. A low smudge to larboard and astern showed the Guinea mainland, and a sail against the smudge. She remained there, and two hours later, while she was crawling up on us, another sail appeared to starboard, and presently changed course to head for us.

The triangle contracted. The sail to larboard had now crawled up abreast of us, a league away, and was heading in as though to cut us off from our course; the one to starboard was yet far enough, but coming up fast. I was talking to Captain Stanwix, and at my suggestion that he hoist Every's signal he swore roundly.

"How can we hoist any signal on the mizzen, when the mizzen's gone? And damme if I'll obey the dictates of—"

A shot broke out from the ship to larboard, and her ports dropped, showing twenty to a side—which, with bow and stern guns, might well make her count up to forty-six.

"Hoist the jack at the main," shouted Stanwix, "and the three ships at the royal —and all hands to quarters!"

So it began, and the *Fancy* crept in from larboard and the *James* came up to starboard, and since they saw we were a Company ship and still came for us, it was clear enough that Every's boast of leaving Englishmen alone was hollow mockery. This was evidenced when the guns began to speak and the triangle contracted into three battling ships, without enough wind to maneuver, but with enough to fetch the three slowly together.

Our first shot went slap into the *James*. Before we could fire a second, the whole coachwork of her toppled forward into the sea, and a billow of smoke puffed up from her forward hold; it was several seconds before the roar reached us, and when the smoke cleared the *James* and most of her crew were gone. All of us stood frozen there, a-stare, gulping at the sight of what we had done with one shot; but if we were struck with the horror of it, Every was not.

A frantic yell from the waist wrenched us about to see the *Fancy* wearing, scarce ten cable lengths from us and off our larboard counter. Smoke puffed from her, and ere the roar of the broadside died, she was about and poured her other broadside slam into us, with never a shot in reply. The shock rocked the *Lisbon* like a cockleshell, and the roar filled the whole world as destruction blew into us alow and aloft. She heeled over, the guns broke loose in the 'tween decks, masts and gear hauled us down and down—and that was the end of the *Lisbon*.

Those of us who could swim did so, and boats from the *Fancy* picked us up, together with some survivors of the *James*. When I came to the deck of the one ship where had been three, I saw my father coming up from another boat, and before me were two men standing.

One was a small, slim man of elegance, clad in black, a small sword at his waist, while a black wig framed saturnine face, piercing gray eyes and long hooked nose. He suggested a bird of prey—a cunning, crafty bird. Gordon Hughes was this, mate of the *Fancy*, and beside him stood his master in name, but one suspected to

be no master in fact of Gordon Hughes.

A big, bluff man was Henry Every, stout and florid. An unpolished morion nigh hid his blue frock coat, high leather boots fell back from his knees, and a gold broidered scarf from his shoulders held three pistols to a side. His brown eyes, regular features and manly bearing were good to see among the crew of port sweepings around. Most of these were English, with one or two negroes among them, but not Englishmen of whom to be proud.

Now a score of us stood there, quickly bound. A word to Every from Hughes, and I was led to one side, with my father and Captain Stanwix; none of our other officers were alive. Every came to us, Hughes following, and nodded reproachfully.

"Too bad, too bad, gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "I don't understand how we lately saw this ship of yours in Cadiz, a Spanish ship, and now find her a Company ship—"

"You blasted pirate!" cried out Stanwix, and I noted that all the crew of the *Fancy* were grouped about, with the survivors of the *James*, staring and listening. "You'll hang for this, you and yours! By gad, the lot of you will come to Execution Dock for this business!"

Hughes produced a snuffbox and took a pinch, and did it with an air too.

"I told you so," he said quietly to Every. "I told you so, Cap'n."

Captain Every reddened.

"I'm no pirate, I'd have you know—"

Stanwix cursed him out, and so did I, while my father stood very silent and quiet. Every spoke, more quietly, but with a certain deadliness in his face.

"You've made it plain enough, gentlemen," he said. "Your names?".

We gave them, and Every squinted at us. Stanwix cursed him again for his lying promises.

"When I left my manifesto at Santa Cruz I meant every word of it," said he. "I mean it still; the blame's on you for not hoisting the signal, since you've seen the manifesto. Captain, governor and assistant factor of the Company—what? All right, gentlemen. Pass me your words of honor that no one will ever know from you how the *Lisbon* was lost, and I put you safe ashore."

"To hell with you," I said, and added a little more which drew the cold gray eyes of Hughes upon me and brought the red to Every's cheeks again.

"Very well," said Every, and turned. "Perch! If any of these three gentlemen ask for me, you may summon me. Otherwise, you know what."

With this, Every and Hughes strode to the companion and went below, and that ended it. A cold blooded and ghastly thing.

For half an hour rum was dealt out freely to all hands—aye, even to our men. The three of us were kept separately under guard of a negro, unsuspecting what was coming. Every's crew was a low lot, certainly, but I had associated with seamen too many years to mistake a two weeks' beard for a badge of crime, or bawled oaths as indication of a perverted character. Unlimited rum, however, will upset the strongest decency, and four of the squat oaken kegs had been broached.

So now the plank was rigged, crazily enough, and with a rush and a yell, one of our poor men was gripped and sent walking and balancing to death, screaming as he went, and this began the work.

Every and Hughes came on deck no more. Once they sent a message to Stanwix, who roared out a reply that must have singed Every and Hughes both, and this was all. The truth of the matter was that Every had made a mistake in attacking us and had no mind to be posted in England as a pirate. He and his men alike meant to stop the tongues of us all, and with his crew drunk enough to do the job, it was done in bestial fashion. Aye, for those who cringed from the plank there was cutlas and mutilation. And I can still see my father stepping out quietly, calmly, as though sauntering down the Mall . . .

Well, so it went, and why they kept me to the last I know not, unless the man Perch relished the killing of a gentleman.

He was that sort—a villainous, crop eared rogue with filibustering oaths on his tongue, and personality enough to make him boatswain of the gang. Most of the men were well roaring drunk, some lying about the decks in stupor; maudlin fights took place among them, and two were pistoled in error while they sought to shoot a struggling seaman overside. The very brutality of their task must have exhausted them before the end came.

So now I was clinging to the rudder post as the curtains of night closed down, and the swinging seas were unruffled by any wind, and in the cabin above me Hughes and Every talked and laughed and drank. And I had something to live for now, something to gain!

CHAPTER III

"DIS BOAT MINE!"

POVERELLO FRANCISCO in his simplest days was rich compared to me as I clung there, for I possessed not even the merest rag to cover my frame. Broken, bruised, naked, hanging on to life itself by a thread, I saw the last deep purple in the west merge into thick black, but the overhang of the ship cut off the stars, and I had only the softly lapping water to bear me company; there was no phosphorescence, and the fluid licking my numbed breast was black as the sky under which it moved. The air was heavy, a haze of clouds hiding the bowl of the sky. My arm and shoulder were well wedged in place, and all sensation had gone from them into a numbness that possessed my whole body.

I must have slept, for I came awake suddenly. Something had bumped me. My exploring hand brought up against a dead face. Others of the dead came visiting me, as well as occasional bits of wreckage, and gradually I became aware that the flotsam of the *James* had come drifting by.

If this floatage were riding shoreward with the tide, as seemed likely, why not I as well? In the depths of despair, hope of life flickered and flared up. I began tentatively testing the wreckage that came around, searching something to bear my weight.

Then, when it came, it nudged me sharply, heaved against my body with a lifting shove that drove me clear—I had to grasp its edge to save myself from going under. After a painful moment I managed to scramble into what had been one of the scuttlebutts of the *James*. My craft scraped along the side of the *Fancy*—surely the strangest craft in which a son of the Company ever set sail—and drifted out and away from the black mass.

The Guinea shore lay a dozen leagues northward. Wind and tide were in my favor, but there was no wind that I could feel, and the tide must, I knew, swing about again. However, I sank down in the huge butt and slept soundly, careless of all else.

When I wakened again, it was to the same blackness, with never a star showing. I heard the same scraping which had come before, and my heart sank as I sensed the huge mass towering above. I had come back to the *Fancy*, then!

But no. I stood up, probing the darkness, and heard a voice in the night above.

"Curse the night!" it said lazily. "Why don't the *Fancy* put out a light, will 'un tell me?"

Not the *Fancy*, then! My pulses leaped again, and I came alert. Now came recollection of that blurred outline against the setting sun—another ship, indeed! Not so large as the *Fancy*, I now perceived, as I scraped softly aft along her freeboard in the windless tide. I caught out and laid hold of some fancy scrollwork under her quarter.

Without pause to balance things or cast up what might happen, I hauled myself up out of the butt. A rope's-end whipped me gently, and in another moment I was up to the rail and lying on it, peering eagerly at the deck below.

Deserted, apparently; a lantern burned on the forepeak, another aft and close to me by the stem of the tiller. Then a whiff of tobacco smoke, and I descried a

figure near the light, a watchman staring off astern—probably the same who had spoken. Something in his voice had brought faint recognition, and now I stared at him, frowning, trying to place where I had ever seen him before. The sails bellied and slatted above me as the ship rolled lazily to the swell.

English, and an English ship; so much was evident. Had she been French, I might look for prison or the galleys. Now that I had chance to think, as I lay there naked, I knew what ship she must be, and began to regret my action in coming aboard. However, too late now. I came on over the rail and dropped inaudibly to the deck. Solid footing was worth while, even if I died for it! The watchman did not hear me, and I stared again at him.

"Dang the pipe," he muttered, and drew steel and tinder from his pocket.

Presently he was sucking his pipe alight, and the tiny glow brought out his profile. I caught my breath. Aye, I knew him well enough!

"Dick! Dick Brandon!" I said softly. "Don't shout now."

He mistook me for one of his shipmates, for he calmly swung around.

"Why should I shout, eh— What the devil!" he ejaculated, sighting my white figure.

This was the *Charles*, Every's third vessel; no doubt about it now.

"Not the devil, but Ralph Willingham," I said, coming closer to him. "Remember how we used to open oysters at the Three Goose Feathers, Dick?"

"Master Ralph— Damme!" he exclaimed, and took a backward step. "It's your voice, right enough. Are ye dropped like some damned spirit out o' the air? None o' that, now! Keep your distance! I loved ye like a brother, master, but I want no spirit aboard me."

I convinced him swiftly enough that I was no spirit, but a naked wounded man, half dead. Then he woke up, bade me save my breath, caught me by the arm and hauled me down the companionway, the lantern bobbing in his hand.

A moment later he had me in a stern cabin, eased me on a bunk and threw a blanket over me. From a cabinet against the inboard bulkhead he drew a bottle of rum and a glass, and I drained the dose thankfully.

"A fine bit o' hellfire I'll get when the cap'n and mate come home, but we needn't expect 'em before daybreak," said he, staring at me. "Where from, master? How aboard?"

In few words, I told him what had happened this day, and it made honest Dick Brandon sick to hear. He nor any one aboard knew what had happened. Just before the late blow, the captain and mate of the *Charles* had gone aboard the *James* for a visit, and had stayed aboard there; so it was evident enough they would never return to their own ship. The three had been separated, and the *Charles* had not yet picked up her consorts, though I knew the *Fancy* could not be far away in the calm night. It seemed that the second mate, Sanders, and the boatswain, Hanson, were now running this ship, and according to Dick they were a pretty pair of devils.

"Hm!" said Dick, sucking his pipe. "You and me have got to handle Hanson; Sanders don't count. He can navigate when he ain't drunk, and that's all. He's got no authority. Hanson has authority, but ain't up to much, when it comes to sailing, and not a soul aboard can do it better. Now, who'll you be? Can't tell Hanson you're a chap who walked a plank off the *Fancy* yesterday. Sure about nobody getting clear of the *James*?"

"A few survivors, but no officers. Every and Hughes would have foregathered with 'em," I said.

"One did get away," said Dick, blinking at me. "You! Mate of the *James*."

"Oh!" I said, getting his idea. "Won't somebody aboard you know better?"

"Not they," said Dick stoutly. "Sanders is dying of liquor—he's a sodden hulk that'll die in a few days. Hanson's never been aboard the *James*, nor has any one else here. You being a mate, can take over the ship. You can take us where you

please. Some of us ain't in the notion of going on the account, master. What d'ye think of the scheme?"

"There's none better, Dick," I said.

"Then roll to sleep," said he, taking up the lantern. "I'll put the ship off her course a bit. We don't want the *Fancy* aboard us when the sun comes up."

He went out, and I was alone again. The wonder of my presence here, of my thus finding a friend, could not stand before my utter exhaustion and need of sleep. Good old Dick, boyhood friend of the Yard alehouse! Aye, he would stand by me well enough. With this thought, I was asleep before I knew it.

A blinding white sun was shining through the cabin window when I wakened. The sun told me that the morning was half gone and we were heading south. I rose, easing my stiff joints and sore limbs until I found that my body was sound enough. A small mirror showed my face grotesquely disfigured by scratches and bruises, gained from the bottom of the *Fancy;* certainly I was no object of beauty.

Now I searched for clothes, and found some that, if they did not fit, at least gave me a presentable look. There were plenty of weapons. I selected two pair of excellent pistols that fitted into a shoulder scarf, but laid these aside for the moment and buckled on a sword belt when I heard voices outside.

"To hell vit' vaiting!" rasped a deep growl. "I'm running dis boat, and any feller comes aboard must see me."

"Mr. Willing is asleep," came the voice of Dick Brandon.

"Dis'll vake him oop, den."

And the cabin door was kicked violently open by Hanson.

He was astonished to find me standing there facing him, and stood blinking. He was tall, blond, heavy set. Round blue eyes stared out of a pink face which ran up, almost without any forehead, to a thick thatch of sunburned flaxen hair. He was smoothshaven, and wore nothing but a pair of cut off trousers hitched about his waist.

"This here is Hanson, Mr. Willing—our bosun. He insisted on waking you up."

"No matter, Brandon," I said, and pulled up a chair for myself. "Come in, Hanson. Close the door."

The boatswain obeyed. I thought I had little to fear from his intelligence—a sad error.

"Well," I said, settling in the chair and looking him over, "has Brandon told you that your cap'n and mate went down with the *James* yesterday?"

"Aye, sir," said Hanson.

"Well, I'll take command here—"

"You vill not," said Hanson, flatly and stubbornly. "If you vant a ship, go back vere you come from. Dis boat mine, py Gott!"

I flung him a sneer.

"So that's your lay, is it? Think you'll outrank me, eh? You won't even stay bosun of this ship if you don't watch your tongue."

"Dis boat mine," said Hanson. "You got nothing to do mit us. You're a castaway."

Obviously, he was set on keeping his command here, and argument was useless, for he thought only in one single straight line. I must jolt him off it, or fight him off it.

"All right, I'm a castaway—and how'll you navigate?"

The card failed, for he grinned at me.

"Follow Cap'n Every's signals."

"And where is he now, to signal you?"

"A league off."

I saw the dismay in Dick Brandon's face. He had been able to give me no warning, and we had not evaded the *Fancy* after all.

"Well," I said, "have you told Every that I was aboard, and your cap'n and mate gone?"

"Aye," said Hanson, a bit of doubt in his eyes. "He not make no answer."

"All right," I said. "What do you propose to do?"

"You go for'ard," said Hanson. "You go in de crew. Dis cabin mine now."

"I'll take the mate's cabin, then," I said, but he shook his head.

"You go for'ard—dat's de law here. Dere's ladies in de mate's cabin. I be down at eight bells. You get ready go for'ard."

With this, he swung about and went away like a blond bull, slamming the door. Dick Brandon looked at me with a shake of his head.

"Bad business, Master Ralph! The crew doesn't care who heads 'em, and they don't like Hanson, but he makes 'em stand around. Kill him, and you'll cow the others. And I'm with you."

"Right," I said. "What's this about women in the mate's cabin?"

Brandon had the grace to blush.

"Some o' them girls we took aboard at Santy Cruz. They were divided up. We got a priest, too. Cap'n Every give pretty strict orders about 'em all and they ain't been touched, but Hanson's got his eye on one of 'em. That's why he aims to stay in authority if he can. Your only way out of it is to kill Hanson, master. Here's summat I fetched to eat."

He laid out some hunks of salt meat and biscuit, and I lost no time pitching into the food, which I needed, washing it down with rum and water. Brandon told me it was close to noon, eight bells. He made it plain that if I let Hanson shove me among the men forward, I would have small hope of gaining any authority among them.

"Have you any powder?" I asked. "There are pistols here, but no powder."

"Not I; gunner's got it all locked up for'ard, sir," he said. "But you'll have to kill Hanson—"

"Come along, then," I said, rising from my chair. "If it has to be done, let's get it done now!"

We started on deck together.

CHAPTER IV

HANSON'S LEGACY

WHEN I stepped out on deck, it was to find as dramatic a picture there in the bright sunlight as could be imagined.

In the waist, about the mainmast, stood a number of the crew, poised, waiting. Half a dozen girls stood back against the poop bulkhead, where the companion doorway opened, and in front of them was a brown clad Franciscan, as though ready to hold off the men while he might. Just to one side stood Hanson and a girl, struggling.

Hanson was laughing. The burly boatswain had the girl by one wrist and was dragging her toward the companionway, when I saw her suddenly leap forward and go at him like a cat, striking and scratching. Hanson emitted a roar and the men jeered him. Then they fell silent at sight of me and stared.

The boatswain was too busy to notice. He struggled with the girl, then got his arms around her, lifted her and flung her bodily toward the doorway. He leaped after her, stooped to catch hold of her again, and then saw me and straightened up.

"Leave her alone, you dog," I said.

He snarled an oath, sprang back a pace and glared at me. The girl crept to her compaions. Then, without a word, Hanson turned and leaped to the rack along the rail, snatched out a heavy cutlas and charged at me with a bellow of rage on his lips. The crimson hanging behind the stark blue of his eyes was the berserk blood madness of his ancestors.

I was out of the doorway and went at him with the sword I had found below, though it was no match for his heavy weapon. I knew from the start that this was no affray of scratches, and a pass or two showed me that he knew his weapon. The men came forward, shouting, formed a wide circle, waited. When I drew blood from Hanson's left shoulder they yelped like dogs.

Yet it was bad business for me, this drawing blood. The crimson curtain behind his eyes darkened, and with a queer inarticulate cry he was at me in blind fury. There could be no fencing here. I worked away from him, gave ground, was driven back to the larboard rail, content so that I kept his whirling blade from sinking into me.

Somehow I evaded it and then, swinging

to the left, edged around to the open deck. As I dodged under his flailing blade, it swung and caught me sidewise—caught me from the lower breast clear across the muscles of my upper left arm, so that the blood spurted out of me and Hanson thought me disembowled before his eyes. He yelled and slashed down again. I caught the blow on my own weapon, and the accursed sword broke, went across the deck in a slithering silver streak, leaving me the hilt and a foot long sliver of shredded steel.

Hanson grinned, swung about, gathered himself. No mercy here. This fight went beyond any such thing; swift and savage it was, to the death! I was hemmed at the rail again, unable to regain balance to slip away, for it all chanced in the merest fraction of an instant. Hanson stepped forward, poised, the muscles rippled on shoulders and chest as he swung for the blow that would finish me—the blow I could not avoid.

His bare foot slid in the pool of my own blood on the deck. His calloused heel slipped on the hot plank with a curious rasping squeal, like that of a nail drawn from an old bed in hard timber. The blow fell, but the cutlas only whistled past me and buried itself with a thud in the rail. Hanson leaned far forward with the thrust of it, overbalanced, and I plunged the shattered remnant of my blade into the hollow between his shoulder and neck.

The overbalanced body shot up as though on springs. An instant Hanson stood glaring at me, the hilt sticking grotesquely from the base of his neck. Then he screamed—and his scream was choked by the blood that spouted from his lips, like spume from the blowhole of a whale, and he crumpled up in a mass of clay.

I looked about. The crew stood motionless, some of their fellows running to join them. Dick Brandon was coming to my side. I saw the friar coming to kneel beside Hanson, and even at this moment I saw him to be a strapping young olive skinned fellow, with more than his share of good looks. Then I swung again to the crew, as Brandon caught my arm to support me.

"Willing by name and willing by nature, lads," I called, taking the name Brandon had given me. "Willing to do as much for any of you, if you call for it, understand? I've taken command of this ship. Brandon, here, becomes mate. Set your watches and keep your course, within sight o' the *Fancy*. Understood?"

"Aye, sir," came the half hearted response, until somebody let out a cheery yell. "'Un be a right proper cap'n, lads! Hurray for 'un!" And hurray they did, as I turned to make the companionway before I fell. I made it by Brandon's aid, and the Franciscan lent a hand, and between them I was soon in the cabin berth again.

AND THERE I stayed for many a weary day, with Hanson's legacy.

In this time I came to know Father Giles very well, and to like him—a strange thing, for I was not bred to any liking for priests or friars. Father Giles was direct as the flight of the *Charles* before the northerly wind, and his strong clear eyes spoke neither of dissimulation nor intrigue. His presence was like a tower of strength to me.

He and I and Dick Brandon spoke together frankly enough, for the friar was to be trusted. I was helpless to move, since a vein in my arm was open and would not heal. Brandon was willing enough, but had no initiative to take head alone against the whole crew. It seemed that Every was keeping us close, had ordered riding lights hoisted each night, and unless a blow came up, there was no chance for Brandon to give him the slip. The crew had been glad enough to replace Hanson with me, were giving Brandon no trouble, and so far all was well in this quarter. Giving Every the slip must wait on me, however—and I must wait on my body.

Plan I had none, except that I wanted vengeance on the *Fancy* and those aboard her, and meant to have it if I lived. I fretted, knowing that Every or Hughes

might come aboard us any day and discover matters; but the days and weeks rolled by and still we drove southward, and gradually my mortal weakness passed.

Thanks to Teresa, indeed, who had nursed me constantly, I was cured, and in strange manner. It was she whose beauty had lured Hanson—she, out of all the ten girls aboard; and small wonder, for she was pure Castilian, the "old Christian" as Spaniards call it, in type—eyes blue as the sky, hair yellow as the sunlight. The vein in my arm stubbornly refused to heal, when one morning she came in with sparkling eyes and called on Father Giles to remove my bandages.

"I 'ave 'ere," she said in her broken English, looking down at me with a gay smile, "what to cure the arm! You see."

None of us knew what she meant to do with the bracelet from her arm. It was in the form of a serpent, thrice coiled, the scales all springy so that the thing would expand and contract. She bandaged my wound with linen, then adjusted the bracelet so it held the linen snugly yet not too tightly. Red seeped through the bandage, but presently it stopped, yellowed at the edges, and took on a darker hue directly under the coils of the snake. Father Giles smiled.

"So woman's vanity is not always in vain, eh?"

I looked from the ruby eyes of the serpent to the sky blue eyes of Teresa, and found tongue to thank her.

As the days passed, the serpent on my arm came to be a symbol. It reminded me less of the Spanish girl ever beside me, than of another blue eyed and sunny-haired girl who was far to the east in Calicut. The little rubies glimmered on me with an evil smile that matched my evil days, and behind them lay an insoluble picture. Those golden coils were slowly contracting about a trio of helpless humans—Anthea, Teresa, and a luckless rascal hight Ralph Willingham, now Master Willing of the pirate ship *Charles*.

We drove steadily southward, lifting never a sail over the horizon, and I knew Every must have some definite end in view. After one vain effort to give him the slip, which was spoiled by our foul bottom and lack of speed, I gave it up and stuck close, hoping that we would sight another ship or two and give me a chance to trap the *Fancy*. I had but one thing to live for, and slipping away from Every would not appease vengeance. Even if the worst happened, I felt willing to take the chance of death in order to carry out my aims, and as the days passed I grew more confident that I could handle Every and Hughes if need were.

Our only difficulty with the crew lay in finding work at which to keep them busy. Brandon shifted and restowed cargo, which was mostly arms and powder and ball, scrubbed woodwork with sand and fish oil, painted and scraped and polished and flaked; and with it all the men had plenty of leisure to loll about the deck and throw dice. They were not a bad lot, taking them by and large, and my fears for the prisoned girls soon died out. These were kept to the quarter deck, but Father Giles went freely among the crew and was soon a general favorite. As to myself and Teresa, I say nothing. We were not enemies, however.

When we sighted Table Mountain, I knew well enough we were headed for the Indian Ocean. We had watered at Santa Cruz and did not stop here, and had not enough scurvy aboard to cause any worry, though it was beginning to break out. However, we had no more than rounded Good Hope, when Brandon came pounding at my cabin door with word that the *Fancy* was standing by, waiting for us and breaking out a boat. It was just sunrise of a calm, clear morning.

"Looks like Every or Hughes coming aboard, master," said he.

"Nothing to do but let him come, then," I said, reaching for my razor. "My pistols are loaded—and we'll see what haps. Keep her on the course—I'll be up shortly."

I trimmed my beard carefully. This hirsute adornment made a tremendous change in my looks, and I was not afraid

of recognition; Every or Hughes, of course, would know I was not the mate of the *James*, but I counted on slipping around this point.

When I got on deck we were standing in for the *Fancy*, and when we were a quarter league from her, a boat bore out for us. One look through the glass showed me that not Every but Hughes sat at the tiller, and I feared this shrewd pseudo-gentleman scoundrel. However, we presently luffed and waited, and in no long time Hughes came over the rail, immaculate in his black attire, snuffbox and all.

I came forward to receive him and exchange bows. His sharp gray eyes bit at me, but he betrayed no sign whatever of recognition; he was impassive, poised, and appeared to give more attention to the ship than to me. He congratulated me on her appearance, and we went together to the poop, which was clear. Then, halting, he turned to me with a half smile.

"Come, come, Mr. Willing!" he said, fumbling at his snuffbox and eyeing me sharply. "You weren't the mate of the *James*, as I know very well. What about it?"

I jerked my thumb toward the waist.

"What matter, Mr. Hughes? Results speak, and you see the ship for yourself. I can navigate, I can handle this ship and command her. Does it concern you whether I was mate of the *James* or an ordinary member of her crew?"

"Devil a bit," said he. "We got the signals you were in command, and supposed there had been some mistake in the names—Aaron Welborn was mate of the *James*, and the signals might easily have been mixed. I came over to fetch you aboard us for a conference with Cap'n Every, so if you're ready we may as well be off."

He had me there, the shrewd scoundrel!

Intuition told me he was playing a sharp game. I could have sworn that no one would recognize Ralph Willingham in me, yet something whispered to me that this rascal had pierced the whole business at one glance. His casual air, his acceptance of my statements, was plausible enough—but the warning persisted. And what to do?

I had no chance for hesitation. If I pistoled him here and now, as I was sorely tempted, it meant that everything else was lost. If I went aboard the *Fancy* with him, then I was in his power—and must stake everything on my cool head. As I had already determined, so I decided now.

"Very well," I said quietly. "We'll use your boat? After you, sir."

So we bowed each other down to the sea and fate.

CHAPTER V

A KING FOR MADAGASCAR

AS I had no time to discuss matters with Father Giles or Teresa, I bade the anxious eyed Brandon a careless *au revoir* and went bobbing over the long rollers toward the *Fancy*, while Hughes carelessly chatted about scurvy and other cheerful sea topics.

When we went over the rail of the other ship, I saw Every up forward among a group of men, and their faces seemed stamped in red on my brain; I knew every one of them, remembered each face and figure from that terrible day of blood. Then I heard the voice of Hughes.

"Some good Spanish wine waiting in the cabin, Mr. Willing. The cap'n will be along."

I preceded him, at each step half expecting to feel the bite of steel in my back. Then we were down in a cabin with books in racks, fitted up luxuriously with Moorish carpets and silver plate. Hughes filled two of the three chalices on the table, and lifted one.

"To your health, sir!" he said, and we touched rims and drank.

I took a stool and a proffered pipe, while Hughes filled another. When the tinder was going and the tobacco alight, he looked full at me.

"Well, sir," he said, "a man of parts like yourself should have selected a less suggestive name than a contraction of his

own. You see, we remembered the name of Willingham."

"So?" I said quietly. "I thought you weren't fooled about it."

"Not after seeing you—though the beard does make a difference. You'll be the only man in history who has walked the plank twice. It'll amuse Every, by gad!"

It was an odd situation. I had a sash full of pistols, he had no weapon in sight; thought I, if the worst comes, I'll do some damage before they down me!

"What inducement?" I asked significantly, looking steadily at him.

He shook his head.

"What could be offered? Would I help you get away so you could put my neck in a noose?"

"Probably not," I said. "It'll be broken by a cart tail drop anyway, so what matter?"

His thin lips parted, and venom glinted in those sharp gray eyes of his.

"You're in a fine position to talk of cart tails! There'll be no mistake about you this time, my young cock—we'll try that neck o' yours ourselves! Aye, by gad, you'll have a drop from a yard arm that'll make sure of things—"

The door opened and Every came in, big and blond, laughing, giving me a surprised glance.

"Too hot for bile, Hughes," he said. "Shouldn't get heated a day like this—"

"Arrgh!" snarled Hughes. "Look at him—ever seen him before? Young Willingham, that's who he is!" Hughes did not rise, but was glaring hatred and fear at me. "He got aboard the *Charles*. The devil must ha' plucked him out o' the sea! Got aboard her and killed Hanson and took her in charge, he did. Remember him now?"

Every stared at me, but made no move for a weapon. The incredulity in his eyes changed to slow recognition, almost admiration.

"Why, here's a brave plucked 'un—good lad!" he exclaimed bluffly.

There was a minute of silence. How had Hughes learned about the killing of Hanson? This question staggered me. I had not left him for a moment aboard my ship— Ah, but I had! I went into the cabin and got freshly primed pistols before I came. For a bare minute, Hughes had been alone on deck. He could not have talked much in that time.

Some one had given him written word, then, or perhaps had spoken quickly. So much was now certain. I had a traitor aboard—and methought I could put a finger on him. Sly old Luke, the cabin boy, who passed for half witted.

"By gad, you'd best do no laughing at this," cried Hughes furiously, "or the laugh will see you hung in chains!"

Every sobered, slammed the door, fastened his mild brown eyes on me.

"Come—is this the truth?" he asked. "Who's aboard the *Charles*? What officers?"

I told him what had become of them, and how I had come aboard, frankly enough.

"I had to kill Hanson," I went on, "but after that everything was smooth. We've had no trouble aboard. Brandon makes a good mate, and all's well—so far."

I eyed the precious pair of them straightly. Hughes was malevolent, perilous. Every was still somewhat puzzled, and neither of them was on the alert. I leaned back carelessly—and had them off guard.

"Freshly primed, gentlemen," I said, slipping out a pistol in either hand. "Now talk things over or we'll all go to hell together. Eh, Cap'n? Keep that dog of yours quiet and let's show a little sense all around."

Yes, I had them right enough; I was ready to pistol them both, and they could see it clearly. Since the game was in my hands, I went on with it.

"Hughes, you're talking about swinging me at a yard arm—and why? So I won't be able to send you to Execution Dock by talking. Don't be a fool! Your whole crew would peach on you in a minute if they could turn king's evidence, and you know it. Now, Every, does it occur to you that if I had wanted

to, I could have doused the lights on the *Charles* and slipped away in the darkness?"

This visibly impressed Every, and even Hughes blinked hard at me. They did not know, of course, about my wound and how I had lain helpless this long while.

"Aye, and why didn't you, then?" asked Every.

"For the same reason I'm here talking with you—because I wanted to stick where I was. I owe the man Perch a thank you for killing my father, and I'll pay him out some day; but that's not between you and me," I said. Since I had to lie, I did it well. "By force of chance, I came into command of a good ship, under a good commander. We're on the account, right enough. What of it? When I'm ready to join and follow you, do you want to throw up a good ship's captain and a good man, in order to keep my mouth shut? Don't be a fool, man."

Every pulled his lip, a habit he had in thought, and eyed me narrowly.

"Egad, you have sense," he commanded. Hughes struck in with vicious word.

"Sense for his own neck, aye! He's dead right, Cap'n—don't be a fool! String him up and ha' done. Anybody can captain the *Charles* and follow us."

"Steady, now," said Every, and I knew my battle was won. "So you'd join us, Mr. Willing—if that's the name you want?"

"Aye," said I, with an appearance of bluff frankness to match his own. "Your word's good with me; say it, and we're all squared off for the future. I'm your man if you want me. If you want to follow the advice of this yelping cur here, then let's blaze away and ha' done as he says!"

"For God's love, don't be a fool!" cried out Hughes passionately. "Would ye trust this rascal?"

"Why not?" returned Every, and laughed suddenly. "I'm cap'n here, ain't I? Get's a bottle of brandy and we'll drink on it. Put up the pistols, Willing. You go back to the *Charles* as master, and that settles it."

"That settles it," I repeated, and stuck the pistols in their holders.

For an instant I thought Hughes would grab his knife and at me, and wished he would, but he came to his feet, went to a locker, and got out a brandy bottle and glasses. As by magic, all his evil looks were wiped away, when he came to the table with the glasses.

"Well and good, Mr. Willing—we work together, then," he said, giving me a long look. "If ye hold me to be a dog, sir, you'll find me faithful to my salt. Be you the same."

"Each of us to his duty as he sees it, Mr. Hughes," I said coolly. "I don't pretend to love you for wanting to hang me, but in your place I'd have said the same, belike. And as for Perch, I'll not let what I hold against him interfere with my duty."

"Frankly said, sir," bawled out Every, filling the mugs and shoving one at me. "Here's luck, and damnation to the Spaniard! D'ye know our plans?"

"No more than you pinned to the church door at Santa Cruz," I said, laughing, and put down a swig of brandy. It did me good.

Hughes smiled in his thin lipped manner.

"Well, since you're one of us, why not? D'ye know the island of Madagascar, sir?"

"Only by chart," I said.

Every nodded.

"I've been there and know it," he observed, pulling at his lip and looking mighty complacent. I think he was glad of our arrangement. "It's the very place for us—friendly natives, and no white men have foothold or come there. We plan to pick a safe harbor, land men and our surplus supplies, and leave them to prepare a settlement as headquarters."

"After the filibustering notion in the West Indies, eh?" I said.

"Aye," said he. "The French had a settlement there years back, but it went to nothing. We sail north with the two ships, and lie off the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb. The Dutch and Portuguese have much commerce there, and the Grand Mogul sends out some amazing

cargoes. D'ye see, sir? We'll be established in a safe haven within striking distance of the sources of wealth; and between ventures we can careen or do what we will, without fear. There's none to bother us. When we have enough plunder laid up, we can abandon our haven and end up in the West Indies or where we like."

"Good enough," I said, no little amazed at this astonishing proposal.

"The main thing we're resolved on," said Hughes, taking a pinch of snuff and offering me the box, which I refused, "is discipline aboard ship. We want none of your haphazard filibustering laws and regulations. It's understood that our men must obey orders navy style, d'ye see. You've kept the *Charles* shipshape, and makes me incline to you; freedom comes when we end up and divide the loot and separate. Until then, discipline!"

"That's brains," said I, with a nod. "And what about shares—my shares, eh?"

Both men eyed me. I poured myself a little more of the smooth brown brandy, and sipped it meditatively as I awaited the reply. Every spoke.

"The arrangement is that Hughes and I take half the plunder, the men share the rest. It was settled that the captains of the *Charles* and *James* were to share a quarter of our half. How does that hit you?"

"The full quarter, aye," I said.

Hughes snapped out an oath.

"Your blasted impudence! To ask for all they were to share between 'em—"

"Why not?" I said blandly.

Every laughed.

"Because we ha' two ships now instead o' three, that's why not," he said. "One less to give us help. No, if you'll not be content wi' what the cap'n of the *Charles* had agreed to—"

"Oh, I will if needs must," I said, and grinned at him. "But I was holding out for all I could get—why not? Luck all around, then, and damnation to them that deserve it!"

So we drank the toast, and Hughes proposed another.

"To the Kingdom of Madagascar, and King Henry the First, who defies the world!" said he, with a laugh at Every.

And this gave me a hint of what grandiose ambitions might lie in the head of the ruddy cheeked captain.

Our personal business settled, the council lasted until well into the afternoon, a most sound dinner being served, with copious libations. Both men wanted some one to talk with, and made the most of me, discussing all sorts of details. It was settled that we should careen and trim both ships at Madagascar, and Every then settled down to drink himself into a stupor. When I went over the side, Hughes was staggering as he accompanied me to the rail, and my head was a little too dizzy to figure out anything.

I remember Dick Brandon's cheerful grin as he hauled me over our own rail, and the smile with which Teresa greeted me—but there was little chance to talk, just then. We lay in the Mozambique Channel, and one of the sudden blinding squalls for which that bit of water is infamous, came down on us ten minutes after I was aboard. It brought lightning that seemed to fill air and water, wind from all directions, and thunder like great guns.

And long ere night fell, we had clear lost the *Fancy* from sight.

CHAPTER VI

FOOD AND RUM APLENTY

THE NIGHT brought me predicament, for when the sky cleared at dawn, the *Fancy* was out of sight. The day was humid and misty, despite the breeze that drove us north and east.

So now I had my choice—to run or not. I had the course to hold, and the rendezvous for the southeast tip of Madagascar in case of separation. I had promised Father Giles to land him and the Spanish women at the first chance, and had clear forgot to ask Every his intentions in regard to them, though now I suspected he

meant to people his settlement with them. If I did not take the chance to leave him for good, I would be responsible for events.

Yet I did not want to take the chance, being stubborn by nature and having resolved on paying out Every and his crew in bitter blood. So when Dick Brandon came to me at the quarter rail with a question, I scarce knew what to say.

"There's the lay of it," I said, after sketching the situation. "To tell the truth, I want to stick with Every until I can smash him."

"Then stick, and damn the women," said Brandon with a laugh. "I'm with you, master! The men are glad you're confirmed as cap'n—not a bad lot, these men."

"Yet I can't let harm come to the women," I said. "And you know how it'll go, once they're set ashore with men for a settlement."

"Chance it," said Brandon, giving me a keen look. "If you fancy any of 'em for yourself, speak out and you'll get her!"

I cursed him off, and he went away chuckling.

We held to our course, raised the high south cape of Madagascar, with the mountains looming behind, and lay to. Next afternoon the *Fancy* showed up and Every came aboard us.

If he had been astonished at finding us waiting, he did not show it, but complimented me on the looks of the ship and came below. I will say for the man that here he showed no lechery, gave the women only a glance to assure himself they were well, and nodded amiably to Father Giles. He had business with me and hastened to announce it.

"We've decided to make you cap'n of the land forces," said he, and while I thought his language rather grandiloquent, I was too taken aback to pay heed. "Aye, you've a head on you, and you keep order among the men! We'll leave you with a score or so o' brave lads and them that are down wi' the scurvy, and let you sink or swim with the settlement. When we come back wi' the broad yellow pieces, I'll warrant you'll be swimming proudly. So here's luck to you!"

Evidently he and Hughes had talked over the matter and settled it, for he was full of decision. To argue with him had been hopeless, and I particularly wanted to arouse no least suspicion in his mind. I had begun to fancy his schemes held something more than mere petty piratical plundering. So I accepted his commission, and saw him over the rail again, and then as we followed the *Fancy* north held counsel with Father Giles, Brandon and Teresa in my cabin.

"There's the lay of the land," I said, after exposing it. "Now, my enmity against those men is too deep for a blow in the dark, a shot and run for it! I want to smash them utterly, and mean to do it. If you're all put ashore in my charge, I'll answer for it that no harm comes to any of you—and when the occasion offers you'll be put in safety. We may, indeed, be able to place you aboard some Spanish ship. Yes or no?"

The other women had no voice, for I would not trust one of them to know who and what I was. Father Giles looked at Teresa, and she smiled at me. She was speaking English well enough now.

"Yes," she said quickly. "I agree to what you say and do!"

"We're in your hands," said Father Giles simply.

Brandon nodded, and so it was settled.

So we followed the coast of the great island to the northward, day upon day, with baffling head winds and calms intervening. Every, it seemed, knew whither he was going. We came at last to a sharply precipitous island, densely wooded, a league off the coast, and midway along this channel was an inlet striking into the heart of the island. To the east rose the high peaks of Madagascar, to the north and northwest showed other islets. We drew in close to the *Fancy*, and Every hailed us.

"Here's Big Island, as the natives call it," he shouted to me. "Y'ave less draught than we; stand in and discover if the inlet opens out into a circular harbor."

"Aye, sir," I returned. "And if we go ashore?"

"Then get off the same way," said he, and roared with laughter.

So we walked the *Charles* up the inlet with a favoring breeze, and on the second tack it opened out as Every had said into a landlocked circular harbor, small but perfect, quite hidden from sight of the sea. I stood on the poop with Brandon, after sending out both boats to make soundings of the channel, and admired the place. For Every's purpose it was ideal, since the inlet could be defended with ease by a battery on either side. Brandon touched my arm.

"Yonder, Master Ralph—see if you pick up a ship's spars."

I took the spyglass he handed me. We were at the north side of the harbor, where the inlet struck out to the sea; all about the harbor were hills, but at the south side whither Brandon pointed there appeared to be a creek mouth, with lower ground. The luxuriant vegetation here, the huge trees, were impenetrable—but among them I thought sure I could make out the straight and regular spars of a ship—unless it were fancy.

Calling in a boat, I dropped into it and we rowed out to where the *Fancy* was standing by, and went aboard. Every and Hughes heard my report with a frown.

"Spars?" said Every. "Damme, Willing, it's impossible! I heard tell of this place from a Portugee navigator who'd been wrecked here once. It's totally unknown."

"Except to your Portugee and any one else he told," I said, chuckling. "The place is ideal for your purpose, if there's no one ahead of us. I couldn't be certain about the ship."

"If there's one here, we can use her," said Hughes. "Let's to it!"

To it we resolved, then, and discussed the matter. Hughes was to bring the *Fancy* into harbor and anchor off the supposed creek, training his guns on the ship if one were there. Every with two boats would land straightway or row up the creek if possible; I was to take ten men and circle about through the trees to come upon the hidden ship from behind. For all we knew there might be a second harbor connected with the first.

Mine was the doubtful honor, then, of first setting foot upon the island. My two boats' crews were happy as larks over getting ashore, and as we loaded muskets and plunged in among the trees, the *Fancy* was just standing in and Every's boats putting off from her.

Our landing was unopposed, nor could we see any human among the trees. As to what now happened, I take no credit. The simple truth was that we became lost. On higher ground the trees were huge in size, everywhere else the jungle was almost impenetrable. Within half an hour we did not know where to turn, and had no luck in trying to get a sight by climbing a tree. And meantime, the afternoon was slipping fast away.

When the sun dropped among the trees, we were no better off than before. We had made no trail to follow back, we could not find the sea or any landmark; none of us were forest men, and we were helpless as babes. Also, we had become well wearied. We tried firing off muskets, but if there were any response we could not hear it. The men were frightened, and the entire lack of any human vestige was not reassuring.

I climbed a tree myself and tried for sights, but could get none except the red sunset slavering treetops and distant hills. I made a determined effort to get orientated and calculate where we might be, for we must have far overshot the creek and hidden ship. I determined to head back northeast, for so we must surely come upon the sea.

Half an hour later we came abruptly on a channel among the trees of the lower ground—a wide and deep creek full thirty feet across. We cried out joyfully, for it was now getting full dark, and swung off to the right, against the current of the creek. Another plunge through the trees, and without warning we came upon what we had been seeking so long—a tall-masted schooner, slightly canted to

starboard but obviously hard and fast aground. Men were aboard her, and when I hailed, Every himself made answer.

"Come ahead, come ahead! She's empty."

They were lighting up torches when I came over the rail, and to my astonishment she was no mossgrown hulk but a fine ship which could have been here no very long while. Every and his men roared over our bedraggled appearance, and made us welcome at the meal they had broken out. He called me down into the cabin, where he had lighted a lamp, and there was rum in plenty.

"From all I can discover, she's a schooner out of the Havana," said he, "though damme if I can make out how she got here! There's food and rum aplenty, so fall to. We've been here the past two hours."

"And never heard us firing our muskets?"

"Never once," he swore, and meant it. "The sound would not carry, belike. If ye remember, we arranged with Hughes for him to give the ship a blast of his guns if there was any firing, and he heard none. Not a soul aboard here, nor any in sight. So fall to, lad, and drink hearty!"

He was drinking heartily enough, and so were the men above on deck, for the schooner's lading was rum. When we, much refreshed, and Every no little drunk, climbed up on deck, the torches had been replenished and all hands were in for a merry carouse.

"If there's been any one aboard who's hanging around," I said to Every, "these lights will be invitation enough—"

The words were cut short by a yell from one of the men, drowned in the report of a musket from among the trees. Another shot sounded, and one of the men about the rum cask forward dropped dead. Then came a scattering of shot, but by this time our men were under the rail, and some of them hurling the cressets overside, and no one was hurt. Every was roaring like a bull to return the fire, and our men began to do so.

Although a heavy fire was now poured into us, none others of our men were hit, and I judged that our assailants numbered only half a dozen or so. Two or three muskets to a man can appear like a large force.

Then, without warning, came a thundering, crashing roar, and cannon balls screamed through the trees and rigging above, and the schooner shivered as one of them hulled her full.

"The fool, the fool!" screamed out Every, in a storm of passion. "Any shot was to be the signal—and the fool has turned his cannon on us!"

So I remembered Hughes, and near had grimmer reason to remember him, when a cannon ball shivered the bulwarks a foot from me and Every and sent splinters ripping around us.

CHAPTER VII

TREASON—AND A ROUND OF GRAPE AS WELL

"SO?" SAID Hughes, coolly facing the storming, cursing Every across the cabin table, with all his imperturbable mien. "Orders are orders, Cap'n. You all went aboard her, broke out the rum, and raised eternal hell. Bah! No wonder they fired on you! I can go ashore in the morning and run them down in no time."

"Then do it, with my blessing," I said, and rose from our conference. "I want some sleep, and by your leave will go for it."

That mad rush to get away from the schooner and back to the ships had cost us no more men, but had shamed us all. And remembering my own wanderings under the trees, I had little faith in Hughes ever going ashore.

Go he did, however, and yells from on deck drew me out of sound morning slumber, to find a boat putting off from shore with Hughes and a stranger in the sternsheets—a half naked man, with flaming red hair and beard. I hurriedly shaved and dressed, tumbled into a boat, and got over to the *Fancy*.

Hughes enjoyed himself as he intro-

duced his find to us—one Cranborn, a rascally ruffian with a Scot's burr to his tongue. He shook hands heartily with us all, clapped Every on the shoulder and came down to the cabin with us.

His story was a mad one. The ship in the creek was one of the new schooner rigged craft out of New England, and had left Havana with a crew of fifteen. The master went stark mad with rum. The crew, most of them slaves deported from Ireland, mutinied, killed the officers, and went on the account. Cranborn, an educated man, had some smattering of navigation and by a miracle made the African coast, rounded the cape, and got this far on his way to India. Their number was reduced to five by disease and hardship, their schooner was in a bad way, and finding this harbor by sheer chance, they had laid up the ship in her present berth at flood tide, meaning to make repairs and set out again for the Indies. Seeing our ships, which had all the looks of navy vessels, they imagined we were after them and opened fire on us.

Learning our true nature from Hughes, they asked no better than to throw in their lot with us. Cranborn was a dour rascal, an embittered man who hated all other men viciously. He was a hard bargainer, however, and over the rum bottle in Every's cabin he drove a good trade. He was to take command of the *Charles* while I remained here, and I was to have his useless ship to break up for building material. His five men were to join our crews.

This was much to my taste, for the immediate availability of building material promised active occupation to my men and comfortable quarters for our captives. And when I thought of the captives, I thought of only one—the straight limbed, blue eyed Castilian girl who had nursed me. When she was in my horizon, I thought of no one else; when she was gone, I thought again of Anthea, the Anthea I would probably never see again.

I remember one evening, when I was still on my back, that Teresa had fed me, and then sat with a bowl cupped in her hands, looking at me. She asked if I had a sweetheart.

"Yes," I said, for I would not lie to her. "A girl I have seen once or twice. She is beautiful as sunlight on playing children, as you are, Teresa. Yet we never spoke of love."

"And you love her?" she asked gravely.

"I thought I did, until I met you," I said, and she smiled at this, and we spoke no more of Anthea. Ah, those tropic nights!

There were no natives on the island, it appeared, though Cranborn had sighted fishing craft off the shores. We laid up the two ships, took out guns and stores, careened them, and set to work.

I was given forty men and had full charge of the camp. Every took over the shipwork, while Hughes set about placing a battery to command the channel, using five eighteen-pounders we found aboard the schooner. And but for this ship and her plentiful supplies, we must have been in sore straits, for when we got our own landed, they proved pitifully small. Most of them would have to be left here with me, since the two fighting ships might or might not return in a month or a year. Cranborn's Irish, who were fishermen, went out and brought in enough fish to vastly relieve the pressure on the stores, for the moment.

There was abundant work for all hands, and Every drove his men like a devil. He and they alike were burning to get to the Indies and have a go at the jewels and gold, and there was no time to think of lesser things. But I noted that he took on a swelling importance, talked about "my" island and ships, and that Hughes delighted to egg him on to grandiloquent notions about the great island of Madagascar that nobody owned except scattered native tribes. Every's former ideas of going back to England with his prospective loot, and leaving himself a safe haven by not molesting English ships, were fast dimming.

The captives were only too glad to take up quarters in a tent or two ashore and remain forgotten. Father Giles was a

prime favorite among all the piratical crew, oddly enough, and had much influence over them. To tell truth, most were Englishmen, and while they were ready enough for rum and carousing and fighting, there was no general inclination for anything worse, so that the women were for the present in no danger. And every one was worked like a dog.

I sent a boat over to the mainland and it came back loaded down with fruits, reporting the natives there kindly disposed and glad to trade. Breaking up the schooner was a job, but we got at it handily and had two buildings in process of erection ere the ships were completed and ready for hauling off at the flood. That night Every held a general council about a roaring fire on the beach—every man jack of us gathered there, and a rum cask broached.

"Day after tomorrow and we're off, lads!" he cried in his bluff, hearty manner. "Off for the East India route and the galleons, and back here with loot and women and wine and food— Eh, my bullies?"

They roared at this, and fell silent again, eager as dogs after game.

"We're going in fighting trim," he went on, "and all o' ye wi' scurvy remain here. A dozen bad 'uns, eh? Cap'n Willing stays in charge, wi' twenty sound men. He takes his pick, tomorrow. Now, my bullies, what say ye to remaining here if we ha' good luck, instead of hitting back for England to spend our gold? Think it over, lads, talk it over! All free men, and no man compelled against his will to anything except discipline."

He left it there, some roaring assent, others looking startled. Hughes took up the word, and this crafty devil knew his business. He painted life in England, and painted life here—no gallows to fear, money and women in plenty, and the Indies next door.

"Think it over, lads," he concluded. "It all hangs on our fighting luck, d'ye see? We're on short rations now, but another fortnight and we should be back with everything in plenty. Then we'll take votes on it. Why not make our own settlement here a permanent place with our own government—like the filibusters in the West Indies? Nobody to object except the Portugee and the Spaniard, and we've teeth enough for them! Here's a priest to start us off proper; Cap'n Willing is building us a town, and we'll soon add enough ladies to these Spanish wenches to make it a full and fitting settlement. Well, think it over! Cap'n Willing picks twenty men, and no one forced against his will. Those that stay to work, share with us who go to fight. Ships hauled off in the morning, guns shifted aboard, and next sunrise sees us off to sea and plunder!"

There was cheering enough now, and I picked my twenty men, with Brandon leading them. Needless to say, I picked the score of most honest fellows, whom I knew well aboard the *Charles*, and none of them refused to stay. The worst cases of scurvy, numbering a dozen, would be of slight use at first, but they were already coming around and would soon be able to lend a hand.

So next day we hauled out the two ships, shifted the guns and provision aboard, and by night they were bound and ready. The five gun battery was in place, I had food and plenty of powder and ball, and Every's heart may well have swelled as he looked over his settlement. And with the flood at next sunrise, the two ships were towed out to catch the breeze, and my battery sent the echoes ringing with a farewell salute—which in my own heart was a curse of the blackest for those aboard the *Fancy*.

I turned to work. One Willum Tubbs, a sober and reliable Dorset man, knew carpentry, so he was in charge of the building. The others were clearing brush and dismantling the schooner. I went up to the schooner, immediately the salute was fired, and was there for an hour overlooking the work and getting timbers floated down the current. I came back to the harbor—and to my amazement, the first person I saw there was Hughes, who had gone with Every.

For a moment I thought myself dreaming, since the ships were gone; and he grinned at my discomfiture, vastly enjoying it.

"Marooned, by gad!" he said, chuckling. "Y' see me, a poor helpless mariner, put ashore by bloody pirates! Will ye ha' me for companion, master?"

"That will I," said I, falling into his mood, apparently. "Every put you ashore?"

"Aye, to keep an eye on things and consult with you. I know his plans, ye see," said Hughes, losing his jesting air. "I'm not to interfere, I promise you. I'll stop aboard the schooner."

"That you won't," I said. "The cabins are going out of her now. We're beginning Every's cabin today, and you'd better take that. We'll have her run up in two or three days."

"Right," he said, and walked off with a nod.

I did not like his presence here. I knew well enough it was by his own choice he had come ashore, for he mistrusted me. Indeed, as I looked after his slender, black clad figure, it was with the strong temptation to call after him, out sword, and settle matters. Yet I refrained. To kill Hughes would avail me little, and would spoil all my larger project. So I, too, turned and went about my business, and saw nothing more of him at once.

Having selected a spot on high ground near the creek, now well cleared of brush, I had by this time done all the preliminary work, even to laying foundations of trimmed logs. With spars and timbers coming down the creek fast, they had only to be caught and brought up to the work. Teresa had charge of the women, while Father Giles pitched in with the rest of us and worked like a good one, his brown habit laid aside, and Willum oversaw the whole.

I had two barracks laid out—flimsy enough buildings, as suited the climate, for which the scorbutics were weaving mat walls—and three other structures, better built, to be used by the officers and women. For these last I was erecting a good house at a distance from the others.

All this ostensible effect of permanence was no more than shadow play, of course, and so I found the presence of Hughes most disturbing. My carefully selected men were by no means anxious to hang for piracy; Tubbs and a few others were only too anxious to get back home to England, rich or poor, with sound necks. I had counted on definitely forming a party to back me up whenever my chance came for a death stroke at Every and the main lot, but now I was forced to go slow, since the sharp gray eyes of Hughes missed nothing.

Indeed, only next evening I was talking with Father Giles and Teresa when Hughes strolled up, eyeing the girl appreciatively, and abruptly demanded a presentation in his best gentleman's manner. He bowed deeply to her.

"Ah, Doña de Leon—a noble name of Spain, indeed!" said he, with his thin half smile. "A fit queen for our new nation—except that she is too beautiful to be the consort of our king! There's treason for you!"

Treason, and a round of grape as well. The girl, understanding, looked angrily at him, and Father Giles frowned.

"What d'ye mean?" I said. "Our king? Is this dream of Every's—"

"Oh, no dream, but solidly practical," said Hughes coolly. "We've settled all details, and when the first prize comes in, and we have women and gold pieces to spread broadcast, we'll let slip the news. Why not, indeed? Every's to be king of Madagascar, and in five years' time we'll be solidly established. As for you, Doña Teresa—" and he turned to the girl—"you will hold a high place in our new kingdom! Hughes promises you that."

"Save your promises, señor," said she in Spanish, which he spoke well. "Any kingdom founded on blood and infamy must come to but one end. As for your captain—faugh!"

Hughes chuckled at her haughty contempt.

"Come, come! When you and your friends are loaded with wealth and finery,

you'll all be happier here than in your miserable stone houses of Santa Cruz."

"Don't be a fool, señor," she snapped. "It's bad enough to be a coward and make war on women, without being fool enough to use such talk."

This struck home. Hughes reddened, for he felt the sting of the words, and they drove a cold deviltry into his eyes as he regarded her.

"You shall see, my pretty one," he said quietly. "By gad, just for that—you shall see!"

He bowed, turned and walked away.

"A kingdom!" said Father Giles softly to me. "So we are establishing a kingdom here, eh?"

"Yes," I said bitterly. "Yes—but we're building on the sand, remember."

Odd as it may seem, this revelation heartened me, rather than the reverse—coalesced all my deep resolve for vengeance. Behind Every stood Hughes, puffing up this scheme of a kingdom for his own purposes. So much the better! My revenge would not merely wreck a piratical cruise and bring a few score men to Execution Dock. It would go deeper. It would smash the dreams of these men, ruin their ambitions and plans and hopes, and themselves as well!

In the days that followed, Hughes kept away from us all. The man undoubtedly suspected me, perhaps from intuition; I meditated killing him and being done, but decided against it, for I would not show my hand until I could make a real stroke.

So the work went forward; but once or twice, when I saw Hughes watching Teresa, I wondered what was in his mind.

CHAPTER VIII

THE NOBLEST LOOT MAN EVER HAD

ON THE day Every brought in his great prize we had the work well in hand—three houses run up, the barracks in fair shape and the trim and finish going forward.

And that night the lagoon sands witnessed wild hilarity and rejoicing, with all restrictions flung to the winds and casks of heady Portuguese wines broached—and a dozen more women crowded in with our little band of frightened girls. I think they all looked for rapine and force that night.

Into Every's new house were carried ironbound chests. Out on the sands a small mountain of fabric bales and rich goods were tarpaulined over. Fires blazed, and wounded men roared out their red deeds; there were a score less men than when the *Charles* and *Fancy* headed northward.

We had the story of the business from Every himself, and as he spoke, I knew why he so held his men. He was every inch the lion; and from olden days Englishmen have ever idolized the bluff lion-heart leader.

"It was a fight, by gad!" he cried, while he and I and Cranborn and Hughes sat about the board. "Two galleons and a man o' war—Portugee, too! We came on 'em wi' the daybreak, and we ran down the man o' war, and the *Charles* grappled him. Ye should ha' seen Cranborn and his forty men lay aboard! Well, he pounded us enough, I'll tell you, and we pounded him, and he went down under us before we could get much out of him. We got enough, by gad!

"Then we went after the two doves, and one showed fight, but the *Fancy* laid in alongside and we had a merry time doing it, all guns spouting and powder burning free. Cranborn went after the third, and never fired a shot at her, but ran alongside and laid her aboard. Luckily they didn't cripple us. Her cap'n surrendered quick enough, and Cranborn fetched her back to us. We had a sweet job wi' the first little dove, for we had to batter her badly, but when Cranborn came up with his good prize and some women aboard, we put every one but the women into my prize, shifted cargoes, and stood off. She went down in an hour."

"With the prisoners?" I asked.

"All hands—a clean job of it!" Every laughed heartily. "A dozen fine women recruits, and here's a health to the lassies!

We've got victuals to burn, wine, treasure, whatnot—and a fine big ship. We'll lay up the *Charles* and send out the two big 'uns. Fine work ye've done here, Mr. Willing. My compliments, sir, and here's your health! One more trip, enough more lassies to keep all hands from grumbling, and we'll set Father Giles to marrying and hold a grand celebration, and ye'll see the woods full o' loving couples."

So it went on, with ranting and boasting and loud talk, and overmuch wine. Hughes lost his cold blooded caution and talked freely. Cranborn was a hardened rascal and boasted of them he had murdered like rats in a trap. It all sickened me, and presently I went out and left them, and up and down the sands saw the fires and heard the boasting words of the men.

I went to the tent Father Giles and Brandon and I were sharing, and told them of it all, and quarreled with Father Giles. He was frightened—not for himself, but for the women—and blamed me sharply enough for not having cut loose and run for it.

"You've nothing more in mind than the women—aye, there you're right, perhaps," I said bitterly. "Yet you agreed—"

"God forgive me, I didn't realize it all!" he said. "And now, with passions inflamed, there may be a division of the women at any moment. Can't we get them aboard one of the ships at night and get out of here?"

It was impossible, as Brandon and I knew, but he argued it excitedly, and we quarreled. Well, we made it up again in the morning, but I felt the responsibility more sharply, for I had taken the fate of these girls and women on my own shoulders.

However, we had nothing to fear immediately. Next day Every inspected our work, stinted no praises and declared that he loved me like a brother. There were spoils to be shared, plans to be laid and repairs to be made to the *Fancy*. The *Charles* was to be left, and eventually broken up, while the new prize was renamed the *Charles* in her place and was fitted up.

Two weeks passed, and our little settlement grew, for shelters were added as storehouses, and there was no lack of hands to do the work. Every himself worked hard, and seemed to have little mind for women, since he hardly went near the quarters of the captives, and issued strict orders against the men molesting them. Hughes and Cranborn visited with them once or twice, and I knew some of the men had picked out prospective consorts, but beyond talk nothing happened.

And if Teresa and I were making love, that was our own affair.

Then, on a day, we officers gathered in Every's house to discuss plans. The man's ambition was inflamed to madness. Now that the possible success of his schemes was demonstrated, he meant to go ahead on the broadest lines. Here where we had built a few huts, there must rise a town, regularly laid out, with fortifications on all sides; Hughes had drawn up plans, and he was a proper draughtsman. He had laid out a small city on paper, and Every was wildly enthused over the idea.

Amid all the loud talk, I quietly slipped in my kernel of destruction.

"And what about a barrier for the channel?"

The other three stared at me.

"A barrier?" said Every.

"Aye. Y'ave higher ground on either side, where the turn comes, and no lack of boulders and loose rock," I said coolly. "The turn is narrow, with bare ship room. Well enough to have a battery—but batteries have been run before now. Mine the rock on either side the channel there, and heap up boulders and rock, so it'll throw sideways. Then at a pinch you can blow hell out of any one there, and close the channel to boot. It's not any too deep now. Besides, there'll be a good powder magazine, or a pair of 'em, far enough from the town to remove any chance of accident by fire."

"By gad," exclaimed Cranborn, "there's a notion for you, Cap'n!"

Every struck fire instantly, and even

Hughes approved, so it was settled that Cranborn was to take over the job at once. Then Hughes got out his snuffbox, and trouble with it.

"Mr. Willing is living up to his name, sure enough," said he smoothly, "and ye'd better hasten the wedding party if ye want him to wait, Every!"

I reddened with anger, and Every roared:

"Ho! Haven't wasted time, eh? Good enough, lad, good enough! Which one of the lassies is for you?"

"None," I said. "Hughes, mind your own business."

"Tut, tut," said Hughes in his silky way. "Ye know well enough you've picked the fair Doña Teresa! Cap'n, you're like to lose your promised consort!"

Every chuckled.

"Treason, Mr. Willing!" said he, a twinkle in his eye. "Egad, there'll be a blot on the 'scutcheon of the royal family, will there? To the block with ye!"

"Pox on your jests!" I cried out angrily. "If ye want it straight, then have it—why shouldn't I take a fancy to one of the girls, eh? It's nothing to laugh about."

Every's mirth redoubled, and the others grinned at me.

"Well, y'ave the right of it," said Every unexpectedly. "True, Doña Teresa is the outstanding candidate, and best fitted to mother the royal line; but she doesn't attract me a whit. I like 'em broader in the beam, by gad! Still," he added, and with sudden gravity so I could scarce realize he meant his words in earnest, "one must take account of blood, and hers is the noblest of them all and most worthy of my children. We may plan and work and build, but we must erect a nation on our children."

His eyes widened, and he stared around at us as he spoke.

"Aye, we must build the future on children!" he said earnestly. "Realize that, gentlemen. No easy women and halfcastes for this colony of ours, but true ladies every one of 'em, and true wedlock and honest children! The next prize we bring in will fetch enough, with luck, and if not we'll make a descent on some Dutch or Portugee factory and get some more. So, Mr. Willing, ye want Doña Teresa? Well, ye shall have her, then—if I don't take her myself. We must make a place fit to live in, before we think of wives and children. Let the women remain as they are, for a bit. And the girl goes to you, if I don't take her. That's a promise, by gad!"

"Hold on, Cap'n," said Hughes curtly. His eyes bored into Every, and grimly enough. He was regretting his little jest. "You're assigning this girl to this man—just what you've refused to do! Start it now, and you'll have trouble all around."

"Nonsense," returned Every, with a pull at his mug. "I said Willing should have her if I don't want her myself—eh?"

"And no one else gets a say for her?" said Hughes.

Every looked hard at him.

"Oh-ho! So that's the way the wind lays, eh? Well, Hughes, let it wait, let it wait till the time comes! I've passed my word, and we'll see. King Henry can't go back on his word, by gad, but there are other ways of settling matters."

So it ended, and when I reported the respite to Father Giles, he breathed freely for the first time in days. At worst, we knew what Every's plans were. I began to think the bluff captain a bit mad on the subject of kingship and new nations. Perhaps he was. And I knew how deep and subtle lay the enmity of Hughes—and why; but I did not tell Teresa this.

Now, from building, I had turned to refitting the new *Charles*, a bigger and much more powerful ship than her namesake, but also much slower. I had her in shape, and Every suddenly told me one afternoon to take her out next morning. It was the first hint I had received.

"Where?" I asked. "Out of harbor?"

"Aye; the both of us," said he. "I've charts ready for you, and I'll take out the *Fancy* as quick as we finish watering. We're much faster than you, anyhow. We'll meet at Perim Isle, at the mouth of the Red Sea—and cruise upward."

"But she's Cranborn's ship!" I exclaimed.

"And I'm the lord high admiral o' the fleet, by gad!" said Every, clapping me on the back. "Ye've done fine work here—now show the lads that ye're as good on sea as on land, Willing! Out ye go at dawn. Pick your own crew. We meet at Perim Isle, and luck be with you!"

I was flung on my beam ends and no mistake, but there was no help for it. I really think Every had made up his mind on the spur of the moment, for within an hour the whole camp was in turmoil of preparation. Cranborn, I found, was to remain in charge here.

So, with no more than a chance for a few words with Teresa that night, I had to get aboard my ship and get away—to the greatest adventure and noblest loot ever man had. For who else ever looted the Great Mogul?

CHAPTER IX

"MUTINY"

DICK BRANDON went with me as mate, of course, and before we were out of sight of land, heading north for the Red Sea, he and I were conferring together. Here was piracy forced on us—but what of the future?

"Well, face it, master!" said he frankly. "What's your plan against the *Fancy*?"

"My plan's against the whole mad settlement," I said. "However, if we meet Every and in company with him attack another ship, would the crew obey me?"

"Not if ye turned your guns on Every," said Brandon. "Willum Tubbs and a few others would be glad enough. I could sound out a few more I know of—perhaps a score in all. Not enough, by far!"

"Nor enough to turn our guns on the settlement and blow her up," said I. "But that's what we must do, Brandon. Lay low for the present, fall in with Every's wishes—keep our heads. Get a few of the honest men with us, let the others suspect something's in the wind, see what turns up—and when the moment comes, put the women aboard, send the settlement to hell, and go."

"There's guns on two sides, master," said Brandon, then turned his head, listening.

He came softly to his feet and with a leap was at the door, jerking it open.

He grunted, snapped an oath, and went away. Nobody had been there, yet I could see he was suspicious, had heard something. I knew he suspected our rat-eyed Luke, who acted as cabin boy—a gray old man with crippled leg, who could move spryly enough on occasion. However, he came back presently looking rather ashamed of himself, and grinned at me.

"Bad takin' chances," he said. "Well, master, what'd you do if you had men enough?"

"I'd come up to the channel from the south, land a boatload or two of men to take the settlement in rear, and to cut out the women," I said promptly. "We want the women safe away, and the treasure out of Every's house if we can get it. I'd take Every himself if I could."

"The treasure, eh? That's not so bad," said Brandon, and nodded. I said nothing to him about the powder magazines and choking the harbor—that was as yet held in my own mind. "It all depends on what men join us, master?"

"Aye," said I. "But be adroit, Dick. One wrong man approached, and you'd blow us all up."

Brandon grinned, and emptied his wine.

"Leave it to me, master," said he. "If the crew had wind of it—"

A sudden outburst of sound. Brandon came to his feet, as the door swung open. There stood our sly Luke, a pistol in his hand, a crowd of the men behind him.

"Aye, ye two fine birds!" said Luke, and a breath of cursing came from the men. "Betray us all to Jack Ketch would ye? I heard of it—"

I was held stupefied by the calamity. The rascal had overheard us, had stolen away to bring the men. Nothing but the

most prompt action could save us in this instant—and even as I thought of it, Brandon had acted, swinging up his mug from the table.

The mug struck Luke's pistol, which exploded, sending its bullet wide. Through the smoke I had my sword into his throat. The men yelled and fell back, and Brandon slammed the heavy door and swung the bar into place.

Now came a shouting, a stamping of feet, a roar of men's voices outside. I heard that of Mowbray, our boatswain, and sang out to him. Silence fell momentarily.

"Get those mutinous dogs out of the passage, Mowbray," I called, "or I'll be out with my pistols and open on the lot of you! I'll have every man reported to Every—"

"Belay!" yelled Mowbray. "It's you as'll be reported, you and Brandon!"

I had reached for my pistols. Brandon took a brace; we exchanged no words, for there was no time. I nodded, and he flung open the door. Pistol in each hand, we looked at the men, whom Mowbray now headed.

For an instant it was touch and go—pistols were jerking up, blades were out, knives were poised for the throw. But my smile held them.

"Now, lads, speak up!" I said cheerfully. "Mowbray, take the lead. You've come at me with pistols, and your leader has got what he asked for. When Every learns that you've mutinied against his captain, you'll get what you ask for, likewise. What's it all about?"

This stupefied them, but Mowbray, a blackbrowed rascal, was no fool.

"About?" he roared. "D'ye mean to say you and Brandon ain't been planning to turn on Every and do him in, hey? To turn our guns on the *Fancy* and sink her?"

I perceived that Luke had caught a little of our talk, but not all.

"You rousing fool!" I said, breaking into a laugh and lowering my pistols, "What's all this talk? Are you crazy or am I?"

"Hark'ee, master," said Mowbray stubbornly, "Luke comes to us and says you and Brandon are planning to turn our guns on Every's ship and sink her, and—"

I gave him a good amazed oath.

"D'you take me for a fool?" I cried out. "By the Lord, every man jack of you gets reported to Every for this work! Planning to turn our guns on Every, indeed! Who'd turn 'em? What would you men be doing? And why should I do it in any case?"

Obviously, no one but Luke knew what was in the wind, and Luke would talk of it no more. I saw them look at one another, while Mowbray shuffled uneasily and stammered something. So I put up my pistols.

"Now, lads," I said with an assumption of Every's bluff manner, "Ye should know me too well to play the fool with me. Belike the sun went to Luke's head, or he heard me telling Brandon of a scheme to shift our heavier guns into the *Fancy* to help her main battery. Stuff and nonsense!" I cried angrily. "Why, the thing's absurd, rank stark crazy! Look at it for yourselves!"

"Lumme, 'e did act fair mad. Did 'un see 'is eyes?" said an uneasy voice.

They were quelled, the lot of them, for they had been drinking and the fumes were put out of their brains by the blood at their feet.

"The cabin boy comes running with a stark mad story," I said, "and so ye come with weapons against the captain—knives and pistols all ready! This'll be a fine tale for Every. You're leading them, Mowbray?"

"Eh? Not I, master," said Mowbray quickly, and mightily ashamed. "But ye see, we all never stopped to think—"

"Master Willing, ye'll never report us to Every?" pleaded somebody.

Brandon broke into a sudden laugh.

"Come, Master Ralph!" he exclaimed. "It's a foolish mistake, that's all. Poor Luke went out of his head, and liquor did the rest. Don't blame the lads—"

"Blame them!" I cried in towering passion and a storm of oaths. "By the

eternal, I'll have every man of them strung up—"

We played a fine comedy there, and finished it out on deck. Of course the entire crew had learned what was up, and I appointed a jury out of them to decide on the fate of Mowbray and those who had followed Luke to the cabin. I could scarce keep a straight face when they came and pleaded with me for mercy, admitting the mutiny yet laying the blame on dead Luke.

So the business ended happily all around, with a promise from me that I would say nothing of the whole matter to Every, for which they were mightily grateful. My pretended insistence on punishment quite wiped out of their minds the memory of Luke's words to them, and they were relieved men when it was all over. So were Dick Brandon and I, and the incident showed clearly enough the need for caution. Also, Mowbray came to me afterward, privately, and apologized to me, saying he had been in liquor and was grateful for my mercy to him. We ended up very good friends, indeed.

We sighted no ship all the way north, much to my relief, until we raised an East India Company ship. As she was English, we did not go after her, though I think Every was now ready to defy England itself. Thus without further incident we came to Perim Isle, in the hot Aden gulf, and found Every there ahead of us with a fat prize.

He had brought in a Cambay trader, and to save their own necks her remaining twenty-five Frenchmen had agreed to join our crews. So Every turned them over to me, the *Charles* being short handed, and the captured cargo of rice and heavy commodities was sent into our hold for ballast. As for our affair on the way north, I need not have worried. The men all knew that I stood in high favor with Every, and had no idea of making trouble for themselves.

We remained several days in the little cove of the isle, ranging ashore and keeping a lookout. It was here Every had spied the Portuguese convoy, and he hoped for another. Then, one morning at dawn, our lookout came in with word that a great ship, alone, was bearing downwind for the isle. Our ships were anchored side by side, and Every came to the rail to hail me.

"Out with you, Willing!" he bawled. "I'll stop her as she comes past. Go around the isle and come on us from the rear. She won't run for me alone, where she would from us both, and I'll knock a spar out of her before you come up."

I was glad enough, to tell truth, to keep out of the business if I could, and here was my chance. We did not wait to up anchor, but slipped the cable and stood out; we would not be seen leaving the harbor, and could get on around the little island unseen, and so come up on our prey from behind, if Every stopped her.

Where Every had not figured, however, was on the slow speed of the *Charles*. With the rice and bulk cargo put into her for ballast, she was slower than ever. We rounded the cape safely and stood to the northwest to round the islet, and this took us a good hour; the *Fancy* had gone out to cut off the quarry. Just here, we heard the first distant gun voices, and Mowbray came excitedly up to me.

"We'd best turn back, Cap'n!" he cried out. "If we go clear around, we'll never come up wi' the *Fancy* until it's over!"

"You heard the orders," I said to him. "Get for'ard to your station."

He obeyed, but the crew muttered, though I thought no more of it at the moment.

So we shoved on sluggishly away from the battle, and the light wind proved unlucky for Every that day, since it scarce moved us through the water. Hours passed, and it was nearly noon when we came around the eastern end of the isle and sighted the quarry.

The *Fancy* had been having no easy time of it, as the guns had told us, and now we saw why. High in the water stood the gilded hull of the eastern ship, and Mowbray, who had been in these waters before, screamed out that she was

one of the Mogul's fleet. She was, though we learned it not until later, the *Gunj Suwaje*, or "Exceeding Treasure," and she was destined to live up to her name better than most ships. A great ship indeed, all decked out in pennants and flags, though the *Fancy* had sadly knocked her rigging about, crippling her.

I was in for it now, so I bore down on her. She had fought well with her fourteen brass guns to a side against the heavy forty-six of the *Fancy;* the latter loosed a broadside, and Every signaled us to board, then stood in for her himself.

Undoubtedly the sight of us had demoralized the prey, for he crashed into her and we saw his men pour aboard with slight resistance. For another fifteen minutes we bore down upon her, my men roaring with impatience, for all of us could see the bloody work aboard the great ship's decks, the oriental crew at first being swept back by Every's rush. Then they rallied, and we saw two score different from the others, wearing only white turbans and loin cloths, their leader in a bright saffron robe, who were the mainspring of resistance—savage fighters all.

Then, before we knew it, the *Charles* was surging in under the high gilded counter and hooks were thrown. We had a twelve foot climb to her rail—and as I led my men, the enemy came down upon us. Aye, they took that leap, all of them, headed by their leader; they caught us by surprise, and careless of life, came at us like tigers.

In the midst of it all I saw their leader standing apart and her face abode with me—for she was a woman. A narrow, frail, transparent face it was, and now she stood with hands crossed on breast, calm amid all the tumult, while her men poured at us. Perhaps they had some wild notion of taking our ship and cutting her adrift—and they all but did it.

It was a fight for life now, myself as well as my men. We were split apart, driven forward and aft, caught napping. Then pistols barked, cutlas swung on sword, and my men were upon them like wolves unleashed. Broken, the brown fighters retreated, gained the quarter deck where I stood cut off, and then I was into the battle.

And in a moment more, it seemed, there were but a little group left about the woman—then three or four—then but two. One went down under Mowbray's sword. The other turned, made one leap toward the girl, and his curved sword swung up. She stood, calmly, for the blow; evidently she was not to fall alive into our hands.

As the blow fell, however, my sword warded it, then cut down the striker. And the woman in the yellow robe, unmoving, stood looking at me.

A yell went up from my men, answered from the rail above, where Every and his butcher's crew had finished their work. Well for me, as it turned out, that they had seen the blow struck! Yet the woman stood gazing calmly at me, and her gaze sent a slight shudder through me—she seemed inhuman, beyond womanly feeling. Forty men had died for her, and she showed no emotion. She seemed careless whether my sword bit into her.

I wakened suddenly, and turned to Mowbray.

"Put this woman in my cabin, carefully. Take charge, Brandon."

With this, I made for the rail and climbed up to the huge deck above to meet a roaring welcome from Every, and I paused aghast. Time had passed while the forty had fought us, and Every had completed his work here—not a living soul was left alive on the deck before me. And it had not been fight, but sheer blind slaughter, of men and women alike. Those who had not gone down under the red swords had been flung overboard. A few shrieks and yells from below showed that the work was still going on there.

Another bellow from Every, aft at the companion, summoned me. He plunged out of sight, and I followed him aft. Ere I gained the cabins below, the agonized shrieks of men and the smell of scorched flesh sickened me, but I went on. In a large cabin Every and half a dozen of his

men, one an old Company servant who spoke Hindustani, surrounded a screaming, chattering thing that had been a man. Every one was excited, great oaths filled the air and, catching sight of me, Every swung around with blazing eyes.

"Ha, Willing! Damme, man—what d'ye think? The Grand Mogul's daughter herself is aboard—going to wed the Shah of Persia. Treasure, man, treasure!"

It flashed over me—how those warriors had died for her, and who she must be.

"Aye, then she's locked in my cabin," I said. "It was she led her men—"

"Devil take the wench!" cried Every, though he changed his tune about her ere long. "Come on, Willing—the treasure! For it, lads! Put a knife into this fool and come on!"

So the screaming man got his reward, and we ours.

CHAPTER X

GOLD DRUNK

HALF a million pounds, I have heard said, and I doubt it not a whit. That day, as the three ships lay locked together under the blazing sun, all of us were sheer drunk with gold and jewels, those of us not drunk with blood and liquor.

The Mogul's daughter had her dowry aboard, the four hundred Mecca pilgrims had jewels and gold, and there were gifts for the Shah of Persia, besides the rich lading of the ship herself. Of them all, only the girl locked in my cabin remained alive; and Every was heir. The red decks were yellowed with gold that day, sparkling and flaming with jewels. For once the men got clear out of hand, since Every himself was past all hearing or seeing; he was locked down with the chests of jewels, and cared nothing what went on. And it was a bloody business, literally, for half the treasure that filled our pockets was torn from the bodies of the dead.

As for me, I went back to the *Charles* and cut loose, after sending the Mogul's daughter aboard the *Fancy*, as Every ordered me. She went in silence, unresisting, calm as ever. I think nothing mattered to her—all was fate.

Every himself came aboard that night and cared for our wounded, being a good surgeon. He scarce spoke to me, which I thought passing strange, nor complimented us on our work in getting the decks shipshape. Nor would he come below for a drink, but paused as he went back.

"Put for Madagascar direct," he said, and gave me the course. "We'll get the lading out of her into the *Fancy*, tonight, and be after you."

Then he went over into his boat, and we went to the lines, and I found Mowbray was not aboard. I made inquiries. He had gone into the Mogul's ship and had not returned, I found, so I thought no more of it at the time.

On the following afternoon the *Fancy* picked us up, shortened sail, and thereafter kept us convoy. Our men were jubilant enough, but I noted that the Frenchmen we had taken into the crew kept much together and did not mingle with our other men. As for me, nothing much mattered; I was still sick at the thought of the orgy of blood and gold and jewels I had witnessed, and could not get it all out of my mind. I am no lily fingered gentleman, but I was not cut out to be a ruffian of Every's stamp.

As we sailed down the long leagues southward, Brandon told me he had made headway. He had picked up some French since he went to sea, and he swore that the twenty-five Frenchmen only sought the first opportunity to get away—that they had joined merely to save their lives. He was fairly sure of a dozen or so of our own men likewise, but dared not speak openly until the time came.

"Wait," I said.

We exchanged no word with the other ship until we drew into sight of our haven, and Every bawled that he would stand in first. He did so. In passing, I noted that Cranborn had done his work well on either side the channel, having heaped up huge cairns there. So we

swung in to our anchorage, and I saw that the old *Charles* had been broken up, and her timbers used ashore on more huts and buildings.

Every sent word to see everything shipshape and then report to him, so it was sunset before I got ashore, and then I went straight to Every's house. From the *Fancy* a steady line of plunder was going ashore, fires were already lighted on the beach and rum casks broached. As I came to Every's house, Mowbray came out, in charge of a number of men. He touched his forelock at sight of me, but the grin on his black face suddenly drove realization into me—I saw everything. Then it was all past, and I was in Every's presence.

He sat leaning back in a huge chair over which was draped some marvelous fabric, and all about were heaped wondrous things, while men piled small chests against the farther wall. He was no longer wearing a uniform, but a cloth-of-gold costume with a sash about his waist, and jewels glittered on every finger. The man was transformed.

"The *Charles* is all stowed and shipshape, and the men are ashore," I reported.

He flung me a glance and a cold look.

"Right, Mr. Willing. You'll remain ashore and consider yourself under arrest."

"I'll what?" I exclaimed.

"You'll do as I say," he snapped angrily. "I've no time for you. I'm wedding the Mogul's daughter tonight, and you'll have your trial in due course. To your own quarters, sir."

Cranborn, beside him, grinned at me, but Hughes was not present. I bowed, turned and left the room. Fortunately, the sight of Mowbray had told me the whole thing—the rascal had gone home with his story, and had primed Every against me. How much he had told, remained to be seen. So far as the arrest was concerned, I was my own guard.

Without ceremony of any kind, Every had taken unto himself the Mogul's daughter, probably considering that a darker skin was beneath any wedlock, yet thus satisfying his longing for a union with noble blood. This amazing fact gave me, at least, no little relief.

I found Father Giles awaiting me, with word that Teresa and the others were safe and well, and before we were done talking, along came Dick Brandon with news that he, too, was ordered under arrest. I flung away impatiently from them both, and ten minutes later was walking with Teresa beneath the trees. To her, in my perplexity and doubt, I poured forth everything, and found comfort. I think this night saw the entire passing of my visionary love for Anthea.

During the next few days nothing happened, except that I perfected plans with Brandon and Father Giles. There was great carousing, and Every made a show of dividing the plunder—but I knew well enough that the best of the little jewel chests remained intact in his cabin. My present predicament showed all too well how fickle luck might be, so Brandon and I applied ourselves seriously to formulate a plan, in which Father Giles joined readily.

And here fortune favored us amazingly. One morning I met Every on the beach. He was getting parties to work throwing up earthworks and cutting trees for a palisade. He knew well enough that his capture of the Mogul's daughter would draw down wrath undiluted upon him, and he was no blind fool. He hailed me bluffly.

"Ha, Willing! Just the man, egad! Look'ee, Cranborn has been slipshod in his work here, so do you take it over, lad. Thirty men, what tools you like—as you please does it! Get that work at the mouth of the channel done shipshape, Willing. No mines ha' been laid yet. See to it."

I was stupefied at this commission, but covered up my feelings.

"You forget I'm under arrest, Cap'n," I said. "And I don't know the cause yet."

"Ho! I'd forgot it." His blue eyes widened on me for a moment. "Right. We'll hold your trial one o' these days. Meantime, fall to work like a good 'un. Take what you want."

With this, he swung away, and I made all haste to get started before he changed his mind. My enemies were given into my hand, if I played the cards aright!

The man Perch, he who had so foully murdered us all from aboard the *Lisbon*, was now charged with outfitting the *Fancy*, which was in much need of repairs. He had brought her close in to the settlement, while the *Charles* lay anchored out near the channel mouth, and I studied the lay of things while Brandon called up men. He appeared, followed by the twenty-five Frenchmen we had taken, and Father Giles was with them. When I saw this, I drew the padre apart.

"What's this, father? These men are your children?"

"Yes, and delighted to find a priest here," said he, beaming. "They are honest men, señor, and only seek to get away—"

"Then tell them to trust me, and they'll do it," I said. "Boats, Brandon! And tools."

It was a good half mile from the settlement across the lagoon to the channel mouth, and once there, I examined Cranborn's work. This was good to look at, but useless. He had merely gathered great stones, heaping them at the narrow part of the channel near the battery. Father Giles was with us, and I showed him the unguarded battery.

"There's your work, when the time comes," I said. "Get spikes while you're here, and have them ready, with a maul. At the word from me, get these guns spiked."

He nodded, and I knew this detail would not be neglected.

While boats were at work bringing over the powder, of which there was a huge store, I set my Frenchmen to the task. Their leader was one Pierre Lachance, a huge red bearded Norman, but a simple and honest fellow enough. Like most of the Madagascar coast along here, the island was a massive rock formation, and here on either side of the forty foot channel the shores were fairly high. Thus, with a bit of powder to help, it was no great work to make a rock chamber to either side the channel, at the very shore.

We were out of contact with the settlement during the days we worked here, only going back at night, and except for occasional visits of inspection, were left to ourselves. Thus it was not hard to reach an understanding with Lachance, who was only too eager at the thought of getting out of Every's clutches with a whole skin. Nor was it a hard matter for Brandon and me to make up fuses and wrap and tar them well.

The great mass of powder once in place, on either side the channel, I myself laid the fuses, running from an open keg to a point on the shore. We said nothing to Every about these buried fuses. His idea was that a fuse could always be laid in time of necessity, and I was not minded to reveal any secrets. Each was about fifty feet long, and well buried. This done, we fell to work heaping up the boulders.

Of Mowbray I saw nothing, for he avoided me. Willum Tubbs, the carpenter, had become intimate with Dick Brandon, and the latter told me we could count on a round dozen men if ever the break came with Every. Rumors of my disgrace had spread about, and no one knew what to think.

Every, meantime, became king in name and fact, for one night was held a wild carouse at which his coronation took place, and thereafter he went from excess to excess in the matter. He had put everything on an organized basis—store houses, supplies and labor—so that I had some little trouble getting casks for fresh water, until I told him they were to contain stones and be used in the magazine. In reality, my men sneaked them out at night to the *Charles*, which was untended, and so made sure of a water supply aboard her.

When I told him the work was nearly done, he came in state on a visit of inspection. He was King Every now, and the Mogul's daughter was queen—a bronze, silent, immobile creature that might have been made of putty. I never heard her speak or saw any emotion in her

face, but she proved soon enough what lay in her soul. Every delighted to robe her grandly and hang her with jewels—as he did himself, in fact. He had taken two of the Spanish girls to wait upon her.

So he was rowed over in his pinnace, with his queen beside him, and I showed him how the magazines were built.

"You can lay fuses when you like," I said. "Here's solid rock in back, and on the water side the boulders and stones are piled. Not enough to close the channel, perhaps—that can be remedied when ye like, if judged necessary. But a ship won't get past, nor small boats neither, for there'll be a volley of stones—"

"Good work, fine work!" cried he, delighted. "Ha, Willing, y'have done right well here! And the spare powder away from the town. Excellent! No, it's plain enough no ship could get into the channel once these magazines were fired. Why, there's a small hill on each side, if it but falls right! Solid rock behind—aye, ye've done it aright. With the battery, this makes the entrance safe enough—let the small boats come on, and overwhelm 'em with one shower of rock—"

Every was delighted with the notion. Then he turned to Hughes, who had accompanied him.

"I think we'll sail in a day or two—take the *Fancy* out for a bit o' work. Suppose we have Mr. Willing's trial tonight? And Brandon's. Both at once."

"And don't forget about the women, your Majesty," said Hughes.

"Right, right." Every was now "majesty" when addressed. He made no hard and fast rule of it, but he liked the sound of the word, and was beginning to feel himself a true king. "Seven tonight, Mr. Willing. We'll hold court."

So he departed, handing his queen into her pinnace—poor stoic bronze creature! Every time I looked at her, I wondered, for she inspired an odd revulsion of spirit, seeming more inhuman than human, even as she had seemed to me at my first sight of her on our deck.

"Ye heard that?" I said to Brandon, when the royal pair had gone. "Trial tonight. Sailing in a day or two—and something about the women. Pass the word to Willum Tubbs, and Father Giles, and have every one ready. No telling what will happen."

"Aye," said he. "And the fuses?"

"You'll take this north side, where Father Giles will attend to the guns. Arrange with him to come in a boat whenever I give the word. Pick your surest man—Tubbs, perhaps—and have him on the south shore of the channel at the same time. Matches alight. I'll give the word. We'll have to get the *Charles* out, of course. You can only be ready for whatever happens, and await the definite order from me."

He nodded, understanding perfectly.

Once back in camp, Every's servant, arrayed in outlandish livery, served me with a summons writ on vellum, brave with seals and ribbons. I was to appear before the high court of His Majesty Every at seven of the clock, to answer charges of high treason.

CHAPTER XI

COURT

BEFORE me as I write lies that odd relic of a summons, with the crabbed "Every, R." at the bottom, though the seals have disappeared. And by queer fate, Every's first court was to be his last, though none of us knew it then. But for his action in scuttling the *Lisbon*, there might be an Every, Rex et Imperator, in Madagascar to this very day!

The summons, coupled with what Every had said that morning, struck alarm into me, for I well knew the sudden mad impulses of the man. Brandon was named with me in the summons, and I read it over to him. He did not waste any grins on the wording of it, either.

"Time to be stirring, Master Ralph!" said he gravely.

"Stir, then," I said, pocketing the document. "Tell Lachance to have his men ready tonight, and let one of them be here when we get back from this mock trial, for

orders. Give the same word to Willum Tubbs."

"And suppose we don't come back from that trial, master?" asked he.

"Unless we do, we're lost men anyhow," I said. "So we must."

With this, I went out to find Father Giles, and sent him after Teresa. The three of us went out among the trees, and before I left them we had arranged all details. Teresa answered for the Spanish women following her—aye, and using a knife if necessary!

I had no hesitation in casting the die, for instinct told me it was now or never—that indefinite gathering of forces which warns a man within himself of crisis. And until sunset fell, I sat in the sand, smoking and looking over the lagoon, and in my mind arranging each least detail of the night's work. When I joined Brandon, Father Giles and Cranborn for supper, I knew what must be done.

Long ere the appointed hour, the "court" was the center of all interest. Cressets were nailed to trees, and at the edge of the clearing, on a little rise of ground, Every had erected a canopy of gorgeous silks. When we arrived, he had just taken his place in one great chair, with his queen in another, and both of them arrayed like oriental potentates in flowing robes, while the light of torches and cressets glimmered on jewels. At a table to one side sat a man with ink, paper and quills. The men were seated in rows in the sand, most of them drinking or smoking, all of them wide eyed at the display.

"The Lord Chamberlain will call the court to order!" bellowed Every, when he saw us making our way forward.

Hughes came out, and the grinning men fell silent.

Except in the matter of prevailing discipline, there was nothing formal about King Every's court—in fact, it was rather a travesty, although he was quite blind to it. Rum was served out freely to all hands, and Every, mug in hand, was enjoying himself hugely. Hughes ordered us forward, brought Mowbray to his feet opposite us, and then read out an indictment charging me and Brandon with high treason.

"In what way?" I asked, when he paused there.

"In imagining and planning treason against the person of King Every," said he, "and in acting in a treasonous and traitorous manner on the high seas."

"Well," bawled out Every, "are ye guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, your Majesty," said I, and Brandon the same.

Every, as I say, was enjoying himself. He was unable to see the barbaric burlesque of the scene, but he was feeling the weight of kingship; and I could see in his liquor warmed eye that he did not take the charge of high treason any too seriously. Had he known what was in my heart and mind that moment, he had been another man.

Hughes, however, was different. I believe he read a certain grim intentness in my look, for from this moment he bent every energy toward throwing gravity into the charges, and showed a vindictive animosity which was palpable.

"Will the prisoners have the advice of counsel or not?" demanded Every.

"If it please your Majesty," I said, and the title pleased him hugely, "I myself will act as counsel for the defense. May I ask who is conducting the prosecution?"

"The Lord Chamberlain," said Every, and settled back in his chair. "Proceed! Lord Chamberlain, bring up your witnesses and establish your case."

Hughes did so, and put Mowbray on the stand. Certainly Mowbray had never anticipated such a scene as now confronted him. He told about Luke the cabin boy, how Luke had reported the talk between me and Brandon, and what had happened after. Then, under the prodding of Hughes, he told of our sailing clear around Perim Isle against his objections, thereby causing Every much loss and delay in taking the Mogul's ship. This charge made every one sit up, including Every himself, and when Hughes then addressed the court and told openly

who I was and what reason I had to hate the whole crew of them, there was instant agitation. This was news to all, and raised an instant yell to hang me.

Every silenced this swiftly enough and turned to me.

"What ha' ye to say, Mr. Willing?"

"Little enough, your Majesty," I said disdainfully. "A pack of drunken rascals came bursting into my cabin with pistols out. I ran one of them through, and sobered the rest. They begged hard enough that I wouldn't report it to you. May I call witnesses?"

"Ye may," said Every, and I called up three of my men from the *Charles* and put the question to them.

They admitted readily enough how I had threatened to report the business to Every and how they had begged me out of it.

"Now for one question to Mowbray," I concluded. "Stand up, Mowbray! What did I say to you when you wanted me to put around and join the *Fancy*, off Perim Isle?"

Hughes interposed viciously, but Every quelled him and forced the reply. When Mowbray gave my response about hearing the orders from Every, looks were exchanged and Every himself grinned widely. Then Brandon asked to be let speak, and his words surprised me.

"It was Master Willing," he said bluntly, pointing to the queen, "who saved that lady, your Majesty, when her own men would ha' killed her. He struck the man down himself."

"Aye, by gad!" cried out some one in the crowd. "I saw him myself!"

This swung the crowd mightily. The queen herself sat rigidly upright, her blank gaze shifting from one to another. Her only indication of life was the rise and fall of her bosom.

"Sum up, Lord Chamberlain!" ordered Every, reaching for another mug. "Sum up and ha' done!"

Hughes did a vicious job of it. He was a shrewd man, and he could not have more accurately stated my actual feelings and hopes and plans had he known them. When he had finished, demanding that I be hanged the next dawn, there was dead silence under the trees, and then an uneasy muttering. Every himself was perturbed, and swung his hand at me.

"Your turn, Mr. Willing! Anything to say? Do ye bear us hatred for the past, eh?"

"To the man Perch, your Majesty, I do," said I bluntly. "As for the rest—why, judge from actions, not words! Where's the evidence against me? There is none. What about Perim Isle? I obeyed your orders. What's the evidence for me? Look around you. Look at the town. Look at the defences and magazines. Look at her Majesty, who would be dead but for me. Look at those men sitting out there, my own men from the *Charles* who've cruised with me—do they believe I'm a traitor or not? Their faces say not, egad!"

"And their lips too, master!" came a yell, followed by others.

Every stood up, while Hughes bit his lip, knowing his cause lost.

"Stand up, prisoners at the bar!" he said with a hiccup. "Look upon the face of your king, ye rascals! I find the pair of ye not guilty, and to prove it, by gad, ye shall have an extra share of the treasure! Pannikins all around, lads, and then I've a proclamation to make."

There was a wild yell, and men surrounded me and Brandon enthusiastically, and we had more than one rum pannikin forced upon us, ere silence was restored.

"Now, my loyal subjects all," boomed Every, "I'm drawing up a code o' laws that'll be writ out and posted in the morning. Any dispute between two of ye will mean a fight wi' bare blades, and that's the chief law; the loser loses and the winner wins! Now there's the matter of the ladies in their pen over yonder. Who wants a wife?"

What a yell went up at this! There was ferocity in it, but chiefly lust—and scarce a man there but put all his dirty soul into his voice. Every roared with laughter.

"Right, lads—that's the spirit! Follow your king's example!" he bawled. "There's nigh two hundred of us, and not two score girls, so ye'll draw lots tonight. The winners will be duly and properly married tomorrow. Each man will remain here with his wife, and Mr. Hughes will be in charge. Day after tomorrow we take out the ships—you'll take the *Charles*, Mr. Willing—and see if we can't find a few women for the rest of us. Court's dismissed!"

So the amazing court ended, indeed, and Every escorted his silent, impassive consort back to her abode. Not amid any respectful silence, however—far from it! Excitement ran high, and there was roaring and bellowing of voices, and every man was in for the lottery with voice and fists, while rum was unstinted.

As soon as might be, I worked out of the tumultuous throng, and back to our own abode, where I found Brandon waiting. With him in the darkness were Willum Tubbs, Father Giles, and big Pierre Lachance.

"Now's the time, lads!" I said curtly. "It's now or never!"

So I gave them their orders, and the die was cast with death.

CHAPTER XII

CUTLAS AND DAGGER

"PADRE," said I to Father Giles, "go quickly to the women's quarters. Tell Doña Teresa to get them all away as I've arranged with her—she's to take 'em roundabout and down to the boats. Then join Brandon there and attend to your work at the battery. Brandon, take the padre in your boat, to the north side of the channel, and be ready with match alight. Then jump into your boat and make the *Charles* as we go past. Tubbs, the same to you, but your boat to the south side as arranged. If ye know of any sure men who'll join us, have 'em down to the boats."

I turned to the big Frenchman.

"Pierre, get your men down to the shore. A boat for Brandon, another for Tubbs; get the women and your men off to the *Charles*, and no noise about it either! Shove out all the other boats. The tide's on the ebb and they'll drift. Pick four men, hold out one boat, and bring the four back here to await word from me. All understood?"

"And what," said Brandon amid the general assent, "be you going to do, master?"

"Wait here till all's ready," I said, "and then take a little of the Mogul's treasure with us. Off with you!"

They melted into the darkness. They all of them perfectly understood that I was counting on blocking the *Fancy*—for she could catch the slow old *Charles* in no time if she once got after us. Yet our getting clear depended on a dozen things.

I strode back into the carousing, roaring throng around the fires. No discipline was kept this night, for every man was intent upon the drawing of lots, now going forward, and every mind and tongue were busy upon the lucky ones to remain here with their brides. One rascal had drawn fortune and was auctioning off his luck with ribald jeers, and two others had fallen to knifework over some dispute, but none heeded as they lunged and bled. Flickering torchlight around and flaming rum within had fetched forth the savagery of the whole crew.

Suddenly I heard a voice to one side, and knew it was Hughes speaking.

"Go get Every," said he, his voice urgent. "Quick, lad! There's trouble here."

I turned. A man was starting off running for Every's house. Another was just swinging at me, and it was the man Perch, and I saw Hughes watching us closely. I knew instantly he had put the ruffian upon me, but little mattered.

"So, Master Willing," Perch sneered as he lounged up. "Y'ave told every one of how ye hate me, eh? All but me, poor old Perch! Bain't afeared to tell a man to his face, master?"

"Not a whit," said I, and so gave him a buffet in the mouth that sent him reeling.

He jerked out his knife but Hughes leaped in and held him back.

"Cutlases, lads!" cried out Hughes. "Aye, 'tis the new law! Cutlases, and lively with 'em!"

There was a roar of delight, for this affair did not go unnoticed, both Perch and I being too prominent men. Savage faces ringed us in, torches were swung, and blades were shoved into our hands. Next instant Perch was coming at me—no hesitation, no delay! Short and savage work here! Oath and blow, and maudlin voices yelling us on!

To wild howls, our blades clanged and clashed. The man was roaring oaths as he came for me, as he had roared them that day aboard the *Fancy*. It all came back to me with a rush—the hot sunlight, the blood smeared deck, the shrieking men who fell from the plank, my father walking out like a gentleman to his death, the red sunset—

Perch lay there, and I knew nothing of it until my eyes cleared, nor can I remember the blow. He heaved himself up on one arm and his chest was well nigh cut in two—a great bubbling, grisly wound. He spat an oath at me and then fell forward on the sand, and there was shrill cheering. And amid it all a man running, speaking to Hughes, shouting at him in the tumult.

"Cap'n's drunk, sir—drunk's a lord he be! Bade me to hell and be damned—"

Every drunk! There was the moment made for me, then! I tried to find Hughes in the mob, for the red steel in my hand thirsted after him and my brain was hot; but find him I could not. The men held me prisoner now—surrounded me with eager words and mugs, tore the cutlas from me, forced me to drink and receive their good will. They had not liked Perch, it seemed. Escape from them I could not, for a space, lest I turn their maudlin drunken fellowship to blind anger, so I made the best of it.

The drawing of lots was taken up again, and under cover of the excitement I gained the edge of the crowd and presently slipped away, and turned toward my cabin. I looked to Every's house in passing, and saw a light in it, and so went on.

Time had passed, and I knew Lachance must be waiting for me. He was, indeed—his huge figure came out of the shadows, where his four men were clumped.

"All well!" he reported. "But I could not get off the other boats. They're drawn up above tide mark and men are close by at a fire."

He pointed, and I saw a fire down by the boats, where a watch had probably been set—this night of all others! However, it seemed that everything had passed off without a hitch; the women had been embarked safely, for the guards were at one end of the boat line and the other end was in darkness. Lachance had one boat waiting for us.

"We'll take Every out, throw him into the boat, and hang him in the morning," I said. "Two of you to carry him. He's drunk. The other four of us can lug a chest or two of treasure. Are ye for it?"

"For the devil himself if you lead us!" said Lachance, and the others said aye to this, and we turned to Every's cabin.

Exultation rose high in me, for now it seemed that my enemies were given utterly into my hand. By this time, the *Charles* was ours—our other boats must be towing her out to catch the breeze beyond the channel, if all was well. There had been no alarm. Teresa and the women were off. Every was drunk, and if we took him along with us we not only had a hostage but were sure to be hanging him in the morning—for the channel would be closed against the *Fancy* once my mines went off.

I had forgotten Hughes.

Since I knew the dispositions in Every's cabin, I took a cutlas from one of the Frenchmen, and cautioned them what to do.

"Once I'm inside, I'll either kill him or silence him," I said. "If ye hear no sound, then come straight in. The treasure is stored in the back room, the one Hughes occupied before Every married. The light's in his bedroom. Stand by, now!"

They waited in the shadows outside. while I went to the door and tried it, From the camp, red flickering torchlight, songs, and the howls of men reached me—but only silence from inside the cabin. The door was unbarred and yielded to my hand. A guttering candle burned here in the main room, and a rum bottle was on the table, but the room was empty.

No time to stop for scruples now. Everything hung in the balance. I crossed to the door of the bedroom and knocked. There was no reply. I knocked again, and now methought a gasping sound like a groan came to me. Had Every murdered the woman in drunken rage? It was not unlikely, and on the thought, I shoved open the door.

There in front of me, sitting cross legged on the bed and wearing her yellow robe as I had first seen her, was the Mogul's daughter. She looked at me unblinking, unseeing perhaps, with no flicker of emotion in her old ivory face. Across her lap lay a long thin dagger—and then I saw her yellow robe was all stained red, and I looked around.

Every sat in a chair beside the bed, and from his breast showed the golden hilt of a dagger, twin to the one in the Mogul daughter's lap. It was clear through him and driven into the chair back, pinning him there. He was not dead, for his breath came hard and low sounds issued from his throat.

Low oaths from behind me. Lachance and his men had come in, were standing staring at the sight. I turned to them, and drew the door shut behind me. That impassive, inhuman woman sitting on the bed—well, if she meant the second dagger for herself, let her have it!

"Every's no good to us now," said I. "This way!"

What I had just seen left me stupefied. That cold, statuesque creature—well, there had been passion in her, after all, and revenge! Perhaps she, too, had been only awaiting her time and chance.

The door to the third room was locked, but Lachance sent it crashing with one mad heave, and we were in. Chests here, all the loot of the *Gunj Suwage* in front of us. Where to begin? I picked out five small, elaborate boxes off to themselves. They were not heavy.

"Chance them," I said. "We must be gone."

Through the open door I heard the voice of Hughes lifting shrilly above the tumult. It startled me, and I was outside, listening, unmindful of all else. He was near the fires, shouting at the men. I could not hear his words, but the wild thrill of his voice told me that he had taken the alarm.

"Quick, Lachance!" I called. "Hurry, man!"

The five of them came staggering out, each with a box, and we went plunging through the sand for the boats. We had delayed too long on this business, and a curse broke from me as I ran. Lights were flitting, torches waving, and men were running for Every's cabin, while confused yelling showed that Hughes had roused the whole crew. They were streaming toward the shore, torches smoking on the night.

Now everything depended on how well Brandon had done his part. If the *Charles* were not off, we were lost.

"The *Charles* be gone!" went up a shrill yell from the waterside, as under the starlight they looked out across the lagoon. "Hughes! Hughes! Where be ye?"

We were cut off, but for the moment all were too absorbed in drunken amazement to be on the alert. And, as we came to the end of the line of boats, in darkness, a new burst of shouting burst forth in the rear—this time with a wild roaring note in it that transcended all else. The body of Every, dead or alive, had been found.

"Aboard the *Fancy!*" The voice of Hughes lifted, shrilly vibrant. "Lay aboard, lay aboard! To quarters, ye dogs! To the boats, all hands!"

We were down at the boats ourselves now, all six of us, panting and straining. Torches were flitting all along the shore here, and we had been seen. Men were yelling, rushing, running. A pistolet crashed out and the ball whistled.

Now the chests were tumbled in. One boat had been left apart, drawn down half in the water. The Frenchmen started to run her out, but it was too late. They were running at us now, a clump of them. They had us!

CHAPTER XIII

CHANNEL OF DOOM

"EVERY'S dead! They've murdered the cap'n!"

The shouts were ringing up from the camp, running figures were pouring across the sand, men were tumbling into boats. And we, here at the far end of the boat line, were caught. Half a dozen of them were upon us, ignorant who we were, yet aware that we were the escaping rascals they wanted. And as they had glimpse of us, our names went yelling up.

"Out with ye, lads!" I cried. "I'll hold 'em."

Then it was sweep of blade and ring of oath, and hot work we had of it for a moment. The first man up got my cutlas over the face, and screamed his way into hell, and the rest came crowding upon each other. Behind me, I heard the boat go scraping out—then my foot caught, and I went down.

A blade touched me, another reached my left arm—and over me came a roar as Lachance leaped in with swinging cutlas. He cut down a man, drove steel into another; then a pistolet roared and he gulped and collapsed, shot through the head. I had rolled clear, however, and the respite was enough to save us all.

"Help here, comrades!" they yelled, and hung back from my steel. "We have 'un—help!"

I leaped at them, and they fled from me—all but the shouting man, for my blade lopped the arm from him, and he did not flee far. Then I turned again, stooped, found Lachance dead, and was leaping for the boat.

The four Frenchmen had oars out. One of them hauled me in, and the oars dipped. Next moment pistolets were barking up and down the shore, and bullets dropping around us. One of the four men groaned and collapsed, but I took his place and we pulled for dear life.

In the mad confusion we got away from them well enough. By the time they had boats in the water and men tumbling aboard, we were gone into the darkness, making for the channel, and all were too intent on getting aboard the *Fancy* to pursue us—indeed, Hughes was driving them to it frantically, for he thought I was trying to cut out the *Fancy* too. Pity the thought had not come to me of scuttling her!

Too late for that now. The four of us lugged the heavy boat over the dark water, and we could see a mad stream of boats heading out for the *Fancy*, with torches flaring. Some one was already aboard her, for lights were flaming up and lanterns bobbing, and now we heard the creaking of sheaves and tackle across the water. There was a good breeze in the trees, enough to fill topsails handily and take out a ship.

"She's moving!" cried a Frenchman behind me, looking over at the ship. "The *Charles*—where?"

Where indeed? We were at the mouth of the channel now, and no sign of her. I hailed.

"Brandon ahoy!"

"Aye, master," came the response, from the shore to my left, and ahead of us.

"Where's the *Charles*?"

"Standing by outside, unless she's run and left us. No lights showing. Shall we fire the fuse?"

"No!" I snapped, and saved my breath for rowing.

We forged ahead. We were nearly to the elbow turn of the channel, when one of my men cried out, and my heart sank. Torches and lanterns appeared. The *Fancy* was under way and already at the channel mouth behind! And as I looked, her bow chaser belched flame, and grape hailed the water about us—a mere blind shot, but devilish close.

"Fire and row for it!" I called out.

From right and left came response, and

the glimmer of lights, and then the sharp sounds of men tumbling into boats and putting out. Another belch of flame from the ship behind—another blind charge of grape sweeping the channel. One of Brandon's men was hit, and to his cry there went up a savage yell from the *Fancy*.

We laid on the oars. Gad, how we laid on those heavy sweeps and sent our boat bubbling into the night! Every ounce of strength in every pull, with death to the right of us and death to the left, and torture behind! From the other boats I heard the calm voice of Father Giles, and heard Willum Tubbs hearten his oarsmen, and dreaded every instant a new charge of grape from the ship that would disable us. None came. They were too sure of us now, for the topsails were full and the *Fancy* was forging down the channel.

Then I heard the voice of Hughes, piercing shrill and clear from the ship's deck.

"Full broadside when we come about on the tack! Matches, there, matches! Blow those boats to hell!"

We gasped out our hearts on those oars, watching the torch flare with straining eyes. Here was death, and no escape from it either. A broadside of grape would finish us, could not miss us. We saw the tall ship veer, saw her come about, saw the flickering matches along her open ports—

And then, with a rocking roar, the earth opened to right and left, and the heavens fell.

There ends the story, as end it should. When I came to myself again, I was being hauled in over the rail of the *Charles*, and ere I gained my feet, she was coming about and falling off with canvas all a-crackle, and there was a glare on the sky behind us, and all forgot in the kisses of Teresa on my lips.

Whether Every lived or died, whether the *Fancy* went down under the shower of rock or was prisoned in the lagoon, whether Hughes met his end there as I think, or lived to later deviltry—who knows? Not I. And last year I saw my first love Anthea again, home from Calicut with a red cheeked husband, and two children tugging at her sleeve—and I am content with life and the Spanish lass I won from the red decks of Every!

SIX POUNDS OF FURY

A mighty Swede blacksmith who went West and won himself security with a hammer

By HAL FIELD LESLIE

ON THE western bank of a wide and shallow river a long train of covered wagons, still wet and muddy from the crossing, stood at rest. Drawn a little aside from that single file of sturdy vehicles was another wagon, with four ponderous horses hitched to its heavy traces. This lone wagon was larger than any of the others. And upon its high seat, well within the shade of its arching bows, sat a slender woman.

Her face was one to look at twice, and her skin was the color of strained honey. Her lips were a velvet smear of crimson. Her eyes were large and wide and expressive, blue as a forest pool. And about her shapely head were coiled twin braids of gold. She looked like a flower—like a golden lily set down amid the tawny wastes of a parched and rugged land.

Upon the ground beside a front wheel of that wagon two men in earnest conversation stood. One of these, the woman's husband, held the lines of his four horse team in a mighty fist. He was a man of Herculean build. The sleeveless shirt he wore, open now for half its length, revealed a depth of chest and massive structure of arm and shoulder that spoke eloquently of magnificent strength. Above that great barrel of a chest rose a neck that might have been a bull's; and this

in turn supported a square hewed head thatched with a shock of sun bleached hair.

The eyes were a frank and honest blue. There was no great degree of intelligence revealed by the man's features. His countenance bespoke, however, the possession of a slow and dogged determination.

The other man, a gaunt frontiersman and the able guide of that company of westward seeking migrants, bore across his arm the reins of a saddled horse. The man's hand was outstretched, and in its palm lay one of his two heavy belt guns. This weapon he was trying to persuade the driver of that four horse team to accept.

"No!" declared the big man stubbornly. "No! Ay shall not carry with me any gun. Ay am a man of peace."

"You are a fool, Thorsen," retorted the grizzled horseman. "You and your wife are leavin' us, now, and headin' off alone. Remember, this country ain't noways like what you've been used to back East. This is plumb wild territory, where a man cain't never tell what minute he's a-goin' to need protection."

The man Thorsen shook his head in stolid refusal.

"Ay know nothing of guns," he said. "Ay do not want a gun."

"Don't you be such a dum' fool!" cried the other in sudden vexation. "You take this gun. Ef you cain't use it now, you can mighty soon learn how. You take it along."

Still Thorsen only shook his big head.

"Ay do not want a gun," he repeated stubbornly. "Ay am a man of peace."

The old guide gave in, then. He slid the gun back in its holster and held out a gaunt hand in farewell.

"Well, so long, Thorsen. I wish you luck," he said grimly. And then, in softer tone, he spoke a word to the quiet woman on the wagon seat. "Goodby, Miz Thorsen. I reckon you'll prosper right well over yondeh in th' Red Cañon country."

With that he mounted his rangy pony and wheeled and rode on toward the head of the long cavalcade of wagons. And Olaf Thorsen clambered heavily aboard his own conveyance and swung his lead horses toward the remoteness of the Red Cañon country, long days away, whither he was bent.

FOR OLAV THORSEN and his patient wife the sun drenched days that followed upon their departure from the wagon train were all of a monotonous sameness—like glowing yellow beads strung one by one upon an endless wire. From dawn to dark the great wagon, a massive creation of oak and iron, a vehicle without springs and without comfort, creaked and groaned its way along a faint and dusty trail.

At times the broad tires of the heavy wheels bit deep in clinging sand and the four sturdy horses, straining deep in their collars, were hard put to achieve slow progress, foot by foot. Again those wheels lurched and bumped among the cracks and ruts of some dry clay flat or some ancient buffalo wallow; and at such times there came from within the canvas covered depths of the wagon a clanking of metal to metal. The wagon was heavy laden.

A line of hills at last appeared upon the far horizon. A blur of hills, remote, shadowy, yet taking semblance of form and substance as the big wagon moiled nearer through the dancing heat haze. Those shimmering blue hills held Olav Thorsen's gaze with steady persistence. Along toward the heel of the day he spoke of those hills.

"Somewhere over those hills is the place we seek, Helga."

The woman nodded.

"Yes, over the hills," she said. "There the journey will end."

There was a note of weariness, bravely muted, in her voice. Through his preoccupation upon the vista ahead, Olav caught that note. He turned his gaze down upon her, eyes full with a certain doglike devotion. His big arm crept tenderly about her slender shoulders.

"You are tired, Helga?"

"No," she said, but she relaxed a little against the strength of his arm. "No, Olav, I am not tired."

Anxiety shadowed his eyes as he felt that tired pressure of her body against his arm. He spoke a quickening word to the horses. And then a word to her.

"Helga."

"Yes, Olav."

"Ay am sorry now that Ay did not stay by the shop— For you the way has been so long."

"For me it has been nothing but a long happiness," she averred quickly. "Each day in my heart has been a song of gladness. It is freedom, Olav. And the journey will soon be done. In this new land you will do so good. So much better than in the city, Olav."

Here was courage speaking. Strength of the weak lent to the strength of the strong.

He responded quickly to the serene conviction inherent in her words. And they talked of the journey's end and of the days to come, while the westering sun illumined their hopeful faces and painted a beauty of dreams upon the harshness of the land.

Softer against the sunset sky grew the sharp etched line of those distant hills. Mistily blue their bulk became. Blue deepened into purple, and twilight rolled its gentle canopy down across the world. With the evening shadows came a cooling whisper of wind from those vanished hills to temper the lingering heat of day. The horses quickened their legs.

Twilight melted swiftly into dark, and overhead the wide sky was a spread of velvet shot all agleam with dust of diamonds. Upon the high seat of the wagon Helga slept, her golden head pillowed upon her husband's shoulder. And the heart of Olav Thorsen was like to burst with the glory of it. He did not drowse. A viking at the wheel. A viking and his mate sailing west under the high stars across a silver sea of sand, treasure laden.

THAT treasure in the hold of Olav Thorsen's big prairie schooner was neither silver nor gold nor gems. It was a cargo of iron—pigs and straps and rods of varying dimensions. Kegs of horseshoe nails were there, and a forge and bellows, and a ninety pound anvil and all the solid tools necessary to the practise of his craft. Olav Thorsen was a blacksmith.

Olav had worked in a shop, back amid the din of an East coast city. He was a good blacksmith and his work and his wage had been steady. But out of the West had come rumors, whispers of wondrous opportunity, promise of wealth for men who had willing shoulders to put to labor's wheel. These tantalizing whispers struck a responsive chord in Olav Thorsen; for it was in his blood, a heritage, this hunting fortune in far places. In the blood of Helga, too—for was she not of his own people?

Olav was a thrifty man and he had money saved. He gave up his job at the shop and bought oak and iron and bolts and screws and built himself a wagon—a craft as stanch as any his fearless ancestors had ever built on the shores of some far northern fiord to brave the rigors of uncharted seas. More than enough money had been left to load the wagon heavily with everything necessary to the success of his venture, and to buy the four big horses plodding now so steadily onward through the night. This surplus cash, five hundred dollars or so, reposed snugly in a tin box in the depths of a trunk within the wagon.

Olav found it pleasant to think about this money now, while the silent sage marched by and the woman slept within his arm. Money enough to hold worry at bay. Money enough to keep them until such time as his business should be firmly established in that land beyond the vanished hills.

THE WOMAN stirred at last, and wakened. Then Olav guided his wagon a little aside from the dim trail. By starlight he unharnessed his team and tethered the tired brutes where they

might browse upon such sparse sustenance as the land afforded. Then he returned to the wagon and, just as tenderly as a mother might have handled a child, he lifted his wife down from the high seat. They slept beneath the canvas covered bows of the big wagon.

At high noon next day Olav Thorsen's great wagon stood at halt upon the crest of those hills that had vanished blue in the twilight. Blue hills at nightfall, blue hills at dawn; yet, strangely, they were not blue any more, now the veil of distance had been riven. Naked, treeless, gaunt and hard as Olav's anvil, those hills flung ragged crests of another color to the sky.

Red they were—and a tinted world to match them lay outspread below. Red limestone was the spine of those hills. From these red scarps and buttresses a trail led down to flat land too vast in sweep for the eye to compass. Down to red land. And far out upon that painted flat they saw—and even the pulse of stolid Olav quickened at this—a group of habitations diminutive as doll's houses. That would be journey's end.

There was Los Astros, a town set down in the heart of the Red Cañon country. Los Astros town, a port of call for the mighty Texas herds winding northward toward rail's end at Abilene. There was the end of a weary trail in sight. Yet now, for the first time since the the tang of the salt sea flats had been left behind, a shadow akin to passing fear troubled the blue depths of Helga Thorsen's eyes. Perhaps it was premonition. Her gaze swiftly swept that red, red world outflung at their feet; came again to rest upon the distant town, upon Los Astros swimming in a ruddy pool of noontime heat haze.

"Olav! It looks like—like blood!" she exclaimed in a hushed voice.

"It is the rocks, Helga," explained the practical Olav. "It is the rocks and the red land that make it look so."

"Like a land of blood," repeated Helga. "Olva, have we come indeed to a land of bloodshed?"

Olav considered this question for a moment, answered with slow soberness:

"No, Helga; not for us. We are peaceful folks. We come only to work for honest dollars. Nobody will bother us, for we will mind our own business. Have no fear."

AND SO at least Olav Thorsen's huge prairie schooner came to harbor at Los Astros town, found anchorage beneath a stand of giant cottonwoods upon the bank of a shallow stream whose waters were tinged with that all pervasive sanguinary hue that lay upon the land, horizon wide.

The town itself, hidden now from view of those at the cottonwoods by the far high bank of the stream, was a full quarter mile beyond. Scorning shade, flaunting hardihood and endurance to the world, Los Astros lay pinned squarely down to the hot red flat of a low mesa by the flaming lances of the merciless sun. So Olav Thorsen elected to tarry under those welcome trees where his big wagon had come to rest.

The arrival of Thorsen's wagon did not pass unnoticed. Within the hour a rider on a sinewy calico pony came out from the town and slid the high bank and splashed across the stream to the cottonwoods. Olav Thorsen was at the moment engaged in unloading his wagon; nor did he desist in this stolid labor until the newcomer addressed him with a word—

"Howdy."

Olav looked up then. He saw a man, lithe and tall and straight in the saddle. The smile upon that rider's face was a friendly smile. The eyes with which he surveyed Olav and his outfit were clear and fearless eyes. He wore upon his open vest a nickeled badge of civil authority.

"Hallo," responded Olav. And then, when he saw the badge, he said again, "Hallo— You are maybe the police?"

The rider's smile widened a bit at the big man's naive inquiry.

"No," he said. "Me, I'm only a deputy sheriff. You'll excuse my seemin' curi-

osity, but Los Astros is havin' considerable many callers these days, desirable an' otherwise, an' so we sorta like to keep an eye on who drifts in hyeh an' why. I saw your wagon comin' in across th' flat."

Olav nodded slowly. Then, pursuing a thought of his own, he said—

"You are of the law, and so you can tell me will there be any trouble if Ay put my shop here."

"Shop!" echoed the rider. "What sort of an outfit you got, anyway?"

"Ay am blacksmith." Olav indicated the kegs and rods already unloaded, nodded toward the wagon. "My shop is there."

The bronzed deputy surveyed the big man and his wagon with quickened interest. He had halted his pony beside the conveyance; now he reined around the big rear wheel to peer within upon the curiosity of a blacksmith shop descended upon Los Astros from God knew where. But instead of forge and bellows he saw a woman there. Admiration, quick and breathless, held him for the moment enthralled.

"Here is a man of the law," said Thorsen to the woman. "A sheriff come to see us, Helga."

The rider found his tongue and his manners then. Conscious of a sudden embarrassment because his surprise had trapped him into staring, he swept off his wide Stetson and bowed courteously.

"Mel Colton, deputy to Sheriff Henderson," he offered. "At your service, ma'am."

Her smile, full of a sweet and quiet dignity, put Mel at his ease again.

"I am Helga Thorsen," she said simply. "This is my husband, Olav. We have brought with us a blacksmith shop. Would it be allowed for us to set up the forge here under these trees? We like these trees. They are so good after the long miles without shade."

"Ain't nobody goin' to stop you, whatever," Mel assured her. "You're plumb welcome to th' shade."

"There is water here for my tub," put in the practical minded blacksmith. "Do you think Ay can make good business here?"

"Reckon so," assented Mel. "Course the riders hereabouts do most of their own shoein', but there's always a lot of ranch gear needin' to be fixed. Then there's th' big trail wagons goin' up with th' herds from Texas. There's usual somethin' th' matter with them by th' time they hit Los Astros. I reckon you'll make out."

"It is good to hear you say that," said Helga. "They told us, when we left the wagon train, that this would be a good place for us to go."

"HOW FAR did you come alone?" asked Mel curiously. "Your one wagon, I mean."

"We left the other wagons away back by the big river. We have been many days on the way alone. We met not a soul."

Mel Colton's face grew suddenly grave.

"Perhaps it's just as well you didn't," he said. "I notice your husband don't wear a gun. An' I didn't see any rifle on your wagon seat."

"Again there is talk of guns," spoke up Olav heavily. "At the wagons they said Ay should take a gun on the way. But we are peaceful folks."

"All th' same, they done give you good advice," said Mel soberly. "There's times even th' most peaceful man needs a gun to keep himse'f peaceful. A gun on th' hip an' th' ability to use it is pretty good insurance that nobody's a-goin' to bother you much. You get yourself a gun, Thorsen. You've done got somethin' here to protect right careful."

"Sure," agreed the big blacksmith placidly. "In my wagon there is five hundred dollar."

"I ain't meanin' money," said Mel bluntly. "I'm talkin' plain, Thorsen. You've brought your wife to a hard country. You've got a good woman to protect."

It took a moment or two for the slow

minded blacksmith to grasp the significance of Mel Colton's words. But comprehension came, finally. Thorsen's good natured face grew black as a thunder cloud. He squared his big shoulders and flung out his great hands, palms up, fingers curved and tense.

"Ay need no gun," he rumbled. "These hands are for the man who would dare to lay a finger on my wife. They are enough."

A momentary gleam of admiration for the mighty strength of the man showed in Mel Colton's eyes.

"Them hands would be enough," he agreed, "providin' you could lay 'em on your man fast enough. But it's hard beatin' out a bullet, Thorsen. You get yourself a gun. An' meantime, if there's anything I can do to help you get started here, call on me."

Thorsen was himself again.

"You can maybe tell me where to find some rocks," he said. "Ay want to build a kiln to make charcoal for my forge. And Ay must have small wood."

"Ain't a rock bigger'n my fist for ten miles round," Mel told him. "But you don't need rocks; you just wet up some of this 'dobe dirt hereabouts an' you can make bricks that'll dry out plenty hard enough. An' you'll find a right nice growth of aspens in a gully 'bout five miles down th' stream. I reckon they'll do for your charcoal."

"Ay thank you," said Olav, and he fell at work again, unloading his big wagon.

"It is good of you to be friends with us like this," said Helga from out the tail of the wagon as Mel swung his pinto away. "We hope you will come again to see us."

"Shore will," promised Mel. "Right soon."

On the far high bank of the stream Mel turned to wave a hand. He saw Olav Thorsen removing his anvil from the wagon. The big blacksmith handled that heavy mass of iron as if it were a toy; swung it easily to the ground with one mighty hand.

"I'd shore hate to have that strength turned loose on me in anger," thought Mel.

Yet he decided, as he rode on toward the town, to keep a watchful and protective eye upon those two who had come unarmed and trusting to a land where violence abode beneath so thin a veneer of civilization.

THE AFFAIRS of Olav Thorsen prospered well. From dawn to dark his hammer rang. He had no time to build a habitation; the great wagon drawn up beneath the trees still served as roof and bed. His hours were filled with the shoeing of horses, the setting of broad tires upon the great wheels of wagons that did arduous duty on range and trail, and the skilful fashioning of branding irons in diverse and intricate designs, and with all those hundred and one odd jobs that only a blacksmith properly can do. He was a busy man.

So Olav Thorsen had no time for loneliness. It was Helga who was the lonely one.

Once Mel Colton brought Sheriff Henderson's wife to pass a neighborly word with Helga; and twice or thrice thereafter that motherly woman—the only woman in Los Astros town who was fit for one like Helga Thorsen to know—repeated the visit. But in the main, Helga's days were long.

And so it was that desperation at last drove Helga Thorsen to subdue the shyness that was by nature hers and to pass a word now and then with one or another of Olav's customers. Rough men they were, yet courteous enough. But now and then some one among them would look upon her with eyes she did not like.

Buck Bragdon was one of these.

THIS MAN Bragdon was an itinerant trader with a wide and most unsavory reputation for evil doing. Bound south, his wagon heavily loaded with liquor and trade stuff from Abilene, he had stopped at Thorsen's smithy one early morning for some minor iron work to be done. And while the big and silent blacksmith was busily concerned upon

this task, Bragdon had engaged Helga Thorsen in conversation.

Bragdon was a man of no more than medium build, yet in appearance he was striking to the eye. He was dark as an Indian. Perhaps there was in his veins a trace of Indian blood. His cheek bones were high, the nose thin and aquiline. Beneath a drooping dark mustache his ready smile revealed a flash of chalk white teeth. His eyes were black as the charcoal in Olav's forge.

Bragdon's tongue was bold, yet there was nothing in his easy words to offend any woman. It was the fire of quickened interest she saw smoldering in the man's eyes that somehow faintly disturbed Helga Thorsen. She was glad when Olav's job was done and Bragdon's wagon had gone lumbering on in a red dust cloud of its own stirring.

Bragdon had been gone a month. Now he was back again with an empty wagon and a pocket full of money. He showed no disposition to leave Los Astros. Apparently it was the nightly gaming in the Oxbow saloon that held Bragdon at the town. Mel Colton, keenly observant, was the one man in Los Astros who suspected that this was not the true reason for Bragdon's tarrying.

Daily, upon some small pretext or another, Bragdon paid his visit to Olav Thorsen's smithy. Mel Colton found him there on several occasions, in conversation with Thorsen's wife. If Bragdon failed to perceive the uneasiness his attentions were causing Helga Thorsen, Mel Colton didn't. One evening, at the door of the Oxbow, he spoke to Bragdon on the matter.

"Bragdon," he said bluntly, "you are headin' straight into trouble over at that blacksmith shop. You are draggin' your loop for a decent woman who wouldn't look twice at you if you was th' last man livin'."

That was truth, and it hurt.

"What th' hell is rowelin' you!" flared Bragdon. "I notice you drift over there some reg'lar, yourself. You figure I'm ridin' on *your* range, maybe?"

"Not whatever, Bragdon." Mel's answer was calm enough, but there was a dangerous glint come to life in his eyes at that sneering insult. "Them Thorsens are decent folks, an' you know it. I'm advisin' you to coil your rope an' drift, before that big blacksmith notices how you're annoyin' his wife an' breaks you plumb in two."

Bragdon found in this warning something to amuse him. He chuckled evilly.

"I'm tellin' you this," he declared. "There ain't a man walks that can lay his hands on to me!"

Mel nodded coldly.

"Yeah, you are a slippery snake, Bragdon. An' now *I'm* tellin' *you* this—first wrong move you make, I'm goin' to plumb salivate you!"

For a space of seconds Bragdon stood eying the alert deputy keenly, while he savored the unpleasant flavor of that threat. Bragdon would have pulled his gun then and there and tried to make Colton swallow that threat, had he not been keenly aware of the folly of trying to beat the quiet deputy's smoke. Bragdon finally contented himself with insolently consigning Mel to a place where ice is not and then wheeling on his heel and stalking away into the Oxbow for his nightly session at cards.

BUCK BRAGDON awoke next day in an evil frame of mind. He carried with him still the sting of Colton's words—"a woman who wouldn't look at you twice—" It was true enough; he hadn't made any headway there. There was another matter, too, that disturbed him even more. Bragdon had lost his last dollar over the Oxbow tables the preceding night. Thorsen's wife, that reserved and coolly courteous woman with the golden hair, was actually of small account, come down to cases. But empty pockets . . .

And so it was that Buck Bragdon came seriously to think upon that tin box which he had more than once seen Thorsen's wife bring out from the big wagon for the blacksmith to make slow change. He

remembered now the pleasant clink of gold and silver coins within that box . . . Aha! but if that box of Thorsen's should fall into his hands, would not that be a measure of reprisal for the woman's aloofness? So Bragdon rose and dressed himself, determined to possess that black tin box. He wondered, as he buckled on his gun belt, how best he might accomplish his purpose without bringing disaster upon himself.

The day itself—Bragdon finally realized it was Sunday—favored him. The blacksmith, a righteous man, did no work for hire upon this day. There would be no patrons at the smithy. Slight chance that he would be seen at his evil work, for that high bank along the Los Astros side of the stream hid the spot well from view. Bragdon grinned as he considered this. Only a woman and an unarmed man to overcome. It should be easy enough.

A moment of surprise and fear under the threat of his gun; the pair of them bound and gagged and hidden in their wagon; and then perhaps the day and a night might pass before their plight would be discovered. Ample time for Bragdon to lose himself to pursuit among the bad lands adjacent to Los Astros town.

Bragdon hooked up his team and drove unobtrusively away from Los Astros, headed innocently south across the low mesa. Some three or four miles out, he swung abruptly east and his wagon dipped from view into the broad watercourse that led back toward the town and Olav Thorsen's smithy.

An hour or so later Bragdon rounded a bend and came upon the cottonwoods. There was no sign of the Thorsens, either man or woman, there. The place seemed deserted. Bragdon drew close and called toward the great wagon that stood so silent under the trees.

"Ho, Thorsen! I got a little job for you."

There was no answer. Bragdon called again. Still no answer. He looked about him keenly; he noticed, then, that there were but two of Thorsen's big horses in the light pole corral nearby and that the two wheeled cart the blacksmith had contrived to haul wood for his kiln was not in its usual place. Thereupon, a gleam of malevolent satisfaction lighted Bragdon's dusky eyes. He leaped lightly down from his wagon seat and hurried to the rear of the other. The flap of Thorsen's wagon was closed and tied. With swift fingers Bragdon unfastened the thongs that held it down. And after a sharp, quick glance all about to make sure he was not observed, he clambered in.

The interior of Thorsen's big wagon presented an ordered neatness to Bragdon's eyes. He had no interest for this, however; his gaze was caught and held by a small leather covered trunk that reposed at the foot of Thorsen's bed. This trunk, he found, was locked.

Bragdon, casting about for some implement with which he might force entrance into that trunk, remembered the hammer he had noticed lying idle on the anvil's face. He was out of the wagon swiftly, back again with that hammer in hand. It was a heavy and efficient tool. Three swinging blows and the lock was crushed. Bragdon flung back the splintered lid.

IT WAS there—that black tin box for which he had come! Its weight surprised and filled him with a great satisfaction. The box was locked, and he wasted no time in trying to open it. That was a matter he would attend to at his leisure. He tucked the box beneath his arm and swung about to leave, and came then face to face with Olav Thorsen's wife.

She stood at the tail of the big wagon, staring in upon him with wide eyes. Instinctively his gun came out like a striking snake and covered her.

"You keep your mouth shut!" he ordered sharply. "Keep quiet!"

She paid heed neither to his weapon nor his words. Her eyes were fixed upon that black box of coins under his arm.

"Our money!" she exclaimed breath-

lessly. "You would take that money Olav has worked so hard for?"

Bragdon was out of the wagon now, his bleak gaze darting here and there in search of the woman's husband.

"Where is he?" demanded Bragdon roughly. "Where is your man?"

"He is gone for charcoal wood," she said with simple honesty. "But surely you do not mean to take our money away from us?"

There was a sort of wonder in her words, as if she could not believe the truth her eyes were telling her.

Bragdon could laugh, now his first startled moment was done, now that he was sure he had only the woman to deal with. And he did laugh, harsh and short, as he holstered his gun.

"I've got it, ain't I?" he retorted. "I aim to keep it."

Suddenly, swift and ferocious as a pantheress, she was at him, hands clutching for that precious box, tearing at his face, beating at his breast. Bragdon was not expecting this. Her wild attack all but took him off his feet. He dropped the box and clutched at the neck of her dress to steady himself. For a moment he was hard pressed to ward off her assault. But he managed at last to set himself solidly upon his legs. And then he swung a hard and brutal fist upon her face.

She fell all asprawl at Bragdon's feet; lay there white and still. Whether she had fainted or whether his blow had rendered her senseless, Bragdon neither knew nor cared. He only knew he hadn't killed her. Nor did he wish to. But if he didn't, she would soon recover and set a posse from the town upon his trail. And if he did, that deputy with the icy eyes would hunt him down if it took a lifetime. A hell of a mess he was in . . .

It didn't take Bragdon long to make up his mind what to do. He couldn't afford to have the woman ruin his chances of escape with the money. She was an obstacle, a menace to be removed, so he swiftly stooped and picked her up and carried her to his own wagon. None too gently he thrust her in and then tied down the flap upon her. He hurriedly retrieved the fallen box and drove on up the watercourse toward the security of the bad lands, as if the devil held reins and whip.

IT WAS some three hours after Bragdon's hasty depature from the smithy when Olav Thorsen returned with his load of aspen poles. Helga had told him, before he left upon that errand, that she intended to visit awhile with Sheriff Henderson's wife in Los Astros town. From the bend he had waved to her and had seen her tying down the wagon flap. He noticed now that the flap was up. Helga must have returned. He got down from his cart and methodically unharnessed and corraled his horses. Then he approached the wagon with Helga's name upon his lips. He was puzzled to receive no answer.

He looked within the wagon. At first he noticed only that Helga was not there. Then he saw the open lid and splintered lock of his trunk and something like a muffled roar of rage came rumbling up from the deeps of his big chest. With surprising agility for a man of his ample build and poundage, he clambered into his wagon.

Thorsen emerged after a short interval. He moved slowly, like a man stricken dumb by some terrible catastrophe. He had no suspicion, yet, that any evil had befallen his wife; he only knew that all his money was gone. Since he himself was a law abiding man, it was but natural that his thoughts should turn upon the law, natural that he should think first of calling upon that man who had come to him with friendship on the day of his arrival at Los Astros town.

Perhaps he might find Mel Colton at the home of Sheriff Henderson, where Helga must be lingering now. So with that end in view he flung a ponderous saddle upon one of his big horses and set out for the town. He wondered, as he rode, how he should break the news of their loss to Helga.

In Los Astros he found neither Helga

nor Mel Colton. Only Mrs. Henderson was at home. She told him that her husband and his deputy had been called away at daybreak by a messenger bearing tidings of trouble on some far outlying ranch. Yes, Helga had been there to visit with her, but had long since started back to the smithy.

The stolid blacksmith made no comment upon this. He held his own counsel, nor told the good woman of his misfortune. He rode back toward the cottonwoods, carrying now an added burden of anxiety—thinking more, in truth, of Helga's absence than upon the loss of his savings. But not until he was crossing the shallow stream did he begin in his slow way to connect the two.

Apprehension now began to quicken his perceptions. Upon the earth about the rear of his wagon—ground which Helga always kept neatly broomed to smoothness—he found tracks; found a man's tracks other than his own. The small imprints of Helga's boots were there, too. All in all, a blur of tracks that offered him a sore puzzle.

Casting farther afield, he came upon wagon tracks and the marks of resting horses. And he saw that these imprints of shod hoofs had finally bitten deep, as if those horses that made them had been put to a sudden run. He followed the tracks a little way up the margin of the stream. The plainly lengthening stride of the animals convinced him that the team had left most hurriedly.

OLAV returned to the spot where the wagon had stood. He moved with uncertainty, like a man walking in a fog. Upon his brow was evidence of a slow mind groping prodigiously for something it could not find. His eyes found something, though; found a glint of silver in the sand at his feet. A tiny locket with a broken chain. Helga had worn that locket.

The finding of that broken trinket was like the welding in place of a missing link to complete a chain of sure conclusion. Helga was a careful woman; in only one way could that locket have been broken. Struggle—violence!

The face of Olav Thorsen underwent a swift and terrible transformation. No longer did his countenance reveal bewilderment. His massive jaw was set as hard as angle iron. His mouth was hard, too, with lips tight strung across his teeth. His pale blue eyes were points of icy flame.

A sort of berserk rage possessed the big blacksmith. He strode back to the wagon where he had left his saddled horse. The heavy hammer lying in the wagon bed beside his wrecked trunk caught his eye. This he seized and swung for a moment in his mighty hand.

"Ay shall break his head!" he muttered over and over. "Ay shall break his head!"

Then Thorsen mounted and wheeled his big horse into the trail that led away toward the bad lands, vengeance bent. And against the speed of powder and lead his only weapon was a blacksmith's hammer.

Thorsen had no difficulty, at first, in following that trail. But as he progressed steadily up the watercourse the character of the ground began to change. The earth grew hard underfoot, the marks of wheels and hoofs less distinct. So Thorsen at last overran the trail and lost a precious hour before he could find where the wagon had abruptly turned aside into the mouth of a big arroyo.

Watching carefully for another great rain eroded earth crack to join the first and allow the pursued wagon another turn, he followed on at the best speed he could persuade from the heavy legs of his mount. And he became aware at last that the sun was swooping low in the west and that twilight was close at hand. Desperate lest the dark should catch and hold him through long futile hours, he urged his laboring horse to faster pace. Riding so, he was wholly unprepared for that which happened.

Like a sudden apparition in the early dusk, his wife appeared in the trail before him. She had emerged from the mouth of an intersecting arroyo. She was running desperately. Close behind her, his boots

making dull racket upon the hard ground, came Buck Bragdon in pursuit.

The three of them halted as if controlled by a single wire. Helga Thorsen was the first to command her wits. With a cry of thanksgiving on her lips she stumbled forward. Thorsen leaped from saddle and gathered her into the bend of a mighty arm, disregarding Bragdon, seeing only that ugly bruise upon her cheek.

Bragdon stood still where he had halted. He had seen that Thorsen was alone and that he was unarmed, except for that futile hammer in his big right fist. So Bragdon stood now at ease, his gun a reassuring sag against his thigh and his mind content. He felt himself sure master of the situation.

"Helga! Helga! He has hurt you!" There was agony in the big blacksmith's voice. "He has hurt you, Helga!"

"He stole our money, Olav," she sobbed, "and he struck me down and put me in his wagon. I got away."

"Ay shall break his head!" rumbled Olav. He put his wife away gently and fixed his eyes upon the sneering Bragdon. "Ay shall break his head!"

THORSEN did not hurry. He moved toward Bragdon slowly. There was something primeval, something dramatically irresistible, about the big man's measured advance with that heavy hammer raised above his mighty shoulder for the threatened blow.

"Olav! Look out!" cried Helga. "He will shoot!"

Thorsen's big head was weaving slowly from side to side upon his neck. Nor did he pause upon her words.

"Ay shall break his head!" he kept muttering over and over. "Ay shall break his head!"

Bragdon suffered him to approach within a dozen feet before he spoke. Then he said sharply:

"Thorsen! You'd better stop before I drill you clean!"

"Olav! Wait!" cried Helga desperately. "Stop! He will kill you!"

Olav paused, irresolute, as if he but dimly comprehended the significance of those words. Then he halted, stood there like a massive statue, arm upraised and eyes glued upon Buck Bragdon.

Bragdon eyed him cooly for a moment. Then he spoke, and the devil was in his tongue.

"Thorsen, I'm goin' to kill you in a minute. But before I do I want you to know your wife will be well took care of. She's goin' along with me!"

With an evil smile upon his lips, Bragdon reached leisurely for his gun.

Bragdon's words and that deliberate and deadly move that followed them, set chains of terror upon Helga Thorsen. But not so, Olav. Bragdon's words, rather than the move toward his gun, unleashed a demon in the big blacksmith. As the muzzle of Bragdon's ugly gun cleared leather, Olav Thorsen's mighty arm shot out. The heavy hammer left his hand, straight and true. It struck Bragdon full and square upon the brow.

Under the crushing impact of that six pounds of fury hurtling across a dozen feet of the day's afterglow, Buck Bragdon slumped like a polled ox. His gun went off as he fell, and the bullet stung Olav Thorsen's sinewy forearm in its passing.

Olav never felt that wound. He followed the trail of his flying hammer, was upon the prostrate Bragdon like a raging lion, his big hands intent to deal with the man as he deserved.

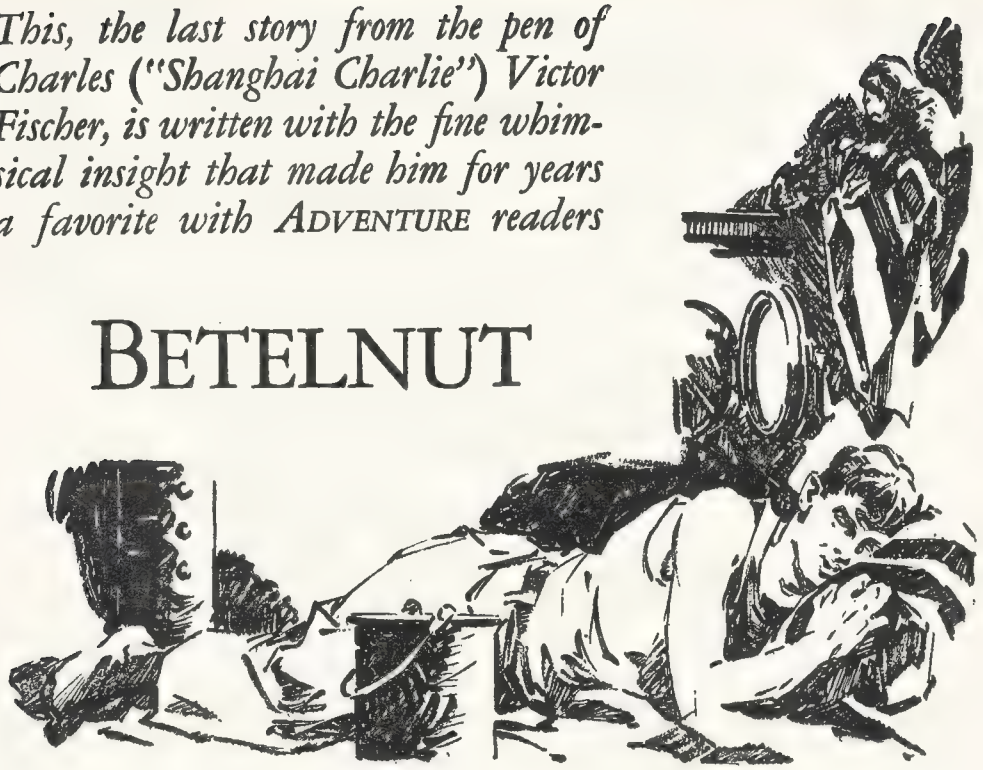
There was no need for this, however; the work of Thorsen's mighty hammer needed no finishing. Buck Bragdon was dead with a complete and devastating thoroughness.

Assured that this was so, the big blacksmith became his calm and gentle self again. He took the shaken woman in his arms, and noticed then for the first time that trickle of blood from his wound.

"Ay think, Helga," he said slowly, "that you spoke right that day on the red hills."

This, the last story from the pen of Charles ("Shanghai Charlie") Victor Fischer, is written with the fine whimsical insight that made him for years a favorite with ADVENTURE *readers*

BETELNUT



By CHARLES VICTOR FISCHER

"ME, SIR? Chew betelnut? Lord no! These are for Wocko, sir. He likes betelnut juice. Yes, sir, give him a rag soaked in betelnut juice and he's the happiest monkey in the world. Search me who he got the habit from. He was wild when I got him. Least I thought he was. I caught him out in the mountains back of Subic, sir."

The speaker was "Hongkong" Whirley, a quartermaster first class of the gunboat *Felena*, enroute from Yokohama to Shanghai. The listener was "Ducky" Dillbury, captain of the *Felena*, They stood on the quarter deck. On Hongkong's shoulder sat the object of their talk, Hongkong's little monkey, Wocko. In Hongkong's hand were the three betelnuts which had aroused Ducky's curiosity and thus launched the conversation. Ducky had just seen his little Filipino cabin boy, Manuel, hand those three betelnuts to Hongkong.

"He probably had been owned and domesticated by some Filipino," observed Ducky. Then, planting his short, squat bulk on feet wide apart, in an amused way he fell to studying the two faces before him—or rather, comparing them.

In truth those two faces did not differ greatly. Both had wild, impish brown eyes and small noses. Wocko's was a much smaller face, of course, and had hair on it; also, Hongkong's hair was curly, and Wocko's straight.

But there was a close resemblance. Moreover, they were similarly knit. Hongkong had wide shoulders, long arms, a slim waist and short legs, and so did Wocko. They looked much so alike, in fact, that many of the *Felena's* two

hundred bluejackets thought Wocko must be the son of Hongkong.

A flicker crept into Ducky's blue eyes and he rubbed his double chin. But he had the thought that Hongkong Whirley was one of the best helmsmen in the Navy, just the same. Ducky turned and waddled over to the rail to view the seascape.

It was early in the evening of what had been an ideal June day. The air was balmy warm, with the summer monsoon blowing a steady cooling breath from the southwest. The sea was smooth, and the inky blue of great depth. Ahead, the westering sun stood like a twenty-dollar gold piece on the blurred horizon. Just beyond that blur was China.

Being in no haste, Ducky had slowed his ship down to five knots. There was no necessity for crossing the bar off Woosong before morning. His cabled orders, received at Yokohama, had read simply, "Proceed Shanghai". He anticipated merely a period of lying in the river at anchor. The Boxer trouble had been almost settled.

Amidships Hongkong halted and picked up his bucket. He intended drawing a half-bucket of fresh water from the galley pump, and in it soaking those three betel-nuts. The juice he would bottle next morning, so as to have it on hand whenever little Wocko began crying for his "ninny", when Hongkong would have only to soak a small rag from the bottle and give it to Wocko to chew on.

TURNING inboard toward a hatchway amidships Hongkong halted as a gob coming up that ladder sang out—

"Gangway!"

To two individuals aboard a man-of-war, clear deck space must be given at that command—an officer or a prisoner under guard. In this case it was the latter. The seaman sentry on the brig post—the *Felena* carried no marines—had shouted the word. He was escorting a general court martial prisoner, one "Rat-Eye" Mowser, up on deck for his evening airing. Hongkong backed out to the rail, his eyes on the prisoner.

Tall, lean, of string-bean proportions, with a hawkish face, shifty little black eyes, a nose like a lobster's claw, a thread-like slit of a mouth, Rat-Eye Mowser was anything but pleasing to behold. He wore the blue woolen shirt and serge trousers of a chief petty officer; but it was just about an absolute certainty that he would soon be changing these for prison gray.

No sympathy for Rat-Eye was there in the eyes of the many gobs idling on the upper deck. Up to his fall from grace of a few weeks before, Rat-Eye had been a chief master-at-arms or "chief jimmy-legs"—ship's chief of police. That alone was enough to leave him marooned, so far as friendship went.

The rating has been abolished in the navy of today. In those days a jimmy-legs was the most despicable creature in the American gob's world. And Rat-Eye Mowser was known as "the meanest jimmylegs in the Navy". He was a grafter, a bloodsucker.

As Rat-Eye stepped out of the hatchway on deck and turned to start forward he saw Hongkong and halted. A more murderous look never gleamed in a pair of evil black eyes.

"You dirty louse!" he growled at Hongking. "I'll get you if I never do anything else."

Hongkong grinned and was seconded by a like grin and a chatter from little Wocko on his shoulder.

"Make sure I ain't around when you're doin' it," he quipped back.

"Go ahead!" Rat-Eye's guard broke in, and Rat-Eye moved on forward.

HONGKONG proceeded on his way below to the galley where he drew his half bucket of water. Then he went aft to the navigator's storeroom, a seven-by-nine cuddy deep down in the after part of the ship, wherein were stored various spare navigating instruments and equipment such as sextants, binoculars, flags, signal halyards.

This small room was Hongkong's, his cleaning station, his lair. He and Wocko

lived there. They kept their personal belongings in a large chest down there. Hongkong spread his mattress and slept on this chest. Wocko slept with him there or on a high shelf among a lot of signal flags.

Rat-Eye's snarled threat came back and lingered with Hongkong that evening. Not that it actually worried him. He had no fear of Rat-Eye Mowser. Hongkong was well able to take care of himself. But it did take root, the conviction that Rat-Eye Mowser would one day attempt to make good that threat. Not for a long time, of course. Rat-Eye was just about cooked, officially. They had him on two charges: having narcotics in his possession and peddling dope.

He was to be tried as soon as the *Felena* joined one or more other ships of the Asiatic Fleet from which a court of officers could be designated.

"Just the same," Hongkong said to Wocko, "some day he'll try just that."

It was Hongkong Whirley who had brought on Rat-Eye's downfall.

The feud between these two had begun months before, when Hongkong was serving a five-day sentence of solitary confinement, on bread and water in the *Felena's* brig, for having turned loose a crate of live chickens in Ducky Dillbury's cabin one early morning. Hongkong was famous for such foolishness.

Rat-Eye, who then had supervision of the prisoners, had let Hongkong lie in that dungeon for a period of forty hours without once bringing him a drink of water. It was the way of Rat-Eye. If a man in the brig had money with which to buy favor, Rat-Eye gave him his full allowance of bread and water; if not, Rat-Eye let him lie there and suffer.

Hongkong had come out of the brig imbued with the ambition to rid the service of this rat. And he had succeeded. Following up a hunch he'd had for some time, namely, the suspicion that Rat-Eye was peddling dope, Hongkong succeeded finally in establishing the guilt. When Hongkong brought this to Ducky Dillbury's attention, Rat-Eye Mowser had ceased to be chief master-at-arms of the *Felena* and had become a general court martial prisoner.

Anticipating an early call next morning, to take the wheel going in over the bar, Hongkong spread his mattress on the chest and undressed early. Hongkong was thinking mostly of a bulky roll of money in his right sock, eight hundred dollars which his last lucky streak with the dice had brought, the same roll that Rat-Eye had attempted to bleed him of, just before Hongkong had pinned him down on the dope peddling charge.

As he dozed Hongkong's mind was a wild whirl of the big time he would have spending that money in Shanghai. Little Wocko, snuggling high up on a shelf among the flags, set up a faint, plaintive chattering, but Hongkong didn't hear him.

FAR FORWARD on the forecastle, his glittering black eyes fixed on the deck, his thin mouth set in a drooping curve, his long bony fingers interlocked behind him, Rat-Eye paced slowly from rail to rail. He appeared to have no further interest in life. Not once did he raise his eyes. By not so much as the flutter of an eyelid did he betray awareness of those who passed him. His guard, standing a dozen paces aft with a gun strapped to his leg, might have been a stone image, as far as Rat-Eye went.

Over on the starboard side, where the shrouds came down to the deck, was a fife-rail, in which were three belaying-pins and a wooden marlinespike. No one would have suspected it, but Rat-Eye's mentality was concentrated on that marlinespike. He did not look in that direction. Gradually, ever so gradually, as twilight gave way to dusk and it came near time for his guard to take him back to the brig, Rat-Eye worked his way aft, in his crosswise walk, so that each time he returned to starboard he was a few inches nearer to that fife-rail.

It was not out of any human considerations that Rat-Eye's choice was the wooden marlinespike instead of one of the iron belaying-pins. He was not considering

the matter of human skulls. An iron belaying-pin would have better served that purpose. But he had another purpose, besides crushing in a skull or two. With one of its ends sharp-pointed the marlinespike would serve both purposes.

Night was fast shutting down over the sea when Rat-Eye halted within arm's reach of the fife-rail. For a few moments he stood there at the rail, looking down at the water surging and lapping against the ship's side. He turned, presently, and stood with his back to the rail, his eyes on the deck. He threw out his arms, as one lazily stretching himself, and yawned.

For the first time in the hour he'd been on deck he betrayed interest in the world about him. With a gleaming flash of those black eyes he took in the guard, a short way aft, interested in two shipmates skylarking, then, the bridge gang, the officer of the deck, quartermaster and messenger, noted that these were all out in the port bridge-wing, then that few other gobs were nearby.

Then, he put it over. Turning again, so that he faced seaward, Rat-Eye lunged, as if a slight lurch of the ship had thrown him off his balance, and caught himself on the fife-rail.

The wooden marlinespike was under Rat-Eye's blue shirt when his guard marched him below to the brig.

The *Felena's* brig was nothing more than a steel box, opening off a narrow passageway deep down forward on the orlop deck. A prisoner locked in that dungeon had four ways of beguiling the long weary hours. He could lean against the outboard bulkhead and look out through the small barred porthole at the swirl of water against the ship's side, pace the length of his cell, two steps each way, chat with the guard outside in the passageway, through a two-inch hole in the steel door, or just sit down and brood over his misery.

Rat-Eye sat down, but not to brood. Other rats were rough-and-tumbling in Rat-Eye Mowser's cunning head that night. His brain was a feverish boil of ideas, in which one object of desire stood out foremost, namely, that eight-hundred-dollar roll of money in Hongkong Whirley's right sock, the roll which he, Rat-Eye, had tried to bleed from Hongkong just before Hongkong gave him that little official shove that resulted in a fall from grace.

At nine oclock, when Rat-Eye's successor, Dick Smiley, the *Felena's* newly made chief master-at-arms, came down to the brig on his final nightly round of inspection, Rat-Eye complained of having cramp. Short, rotund and ruddy, old Smiley was one chief master-at-arms in many. He was a human old-timer. Since he had assumed the billet of ship's chief of police the *Felena* had ceased being a madhouse and had become a home. Smiley suggested that Rat-Eye go to the sick-bay. Rat-Eye declined.

"It'll probably pass off," he growled.

Smiley stepped back over the threshold, closed the door and locked it again. Rat-Eye heard his final orders to the guard outside.

"Same as usual," said Smiley. "Take him up on deck for air if he asks you to. But watch him. He's a phony bird. Keep him at least a dozen feet in front of you. Never let him get behind you! Make sure your gun ain't gonna stick in the holster in case you need it in a hurry. Don't wake me up unless it's necessary! Good night."

Rat-Eye spread his mattress on deck, turned out the overhead light and lay on his back, goggling up at the pale ray of light streaming through the hole in the door. Now and then he cuddled the large smooth spherical end of the wooden marlinespike or felt of its pointed end for keenness.

An hour passed. Two. Rat-Eye kept the time not by the ship's bell but by the number of cigarets the guard outside smoked. He knew that this guard, "Wiggles" Kelley, smoked one every twenty minutes. Rat-Eye emitted a groan of pain every now and then. When Kelley spoke in responce, through the hole in the door, he made no answer.

At about eleven o'clock Rat-Eye arose

and commenced going through a series of antics such as one might expect of a maniac in a padded cell. Crouching over, as one in terrible pain, in the center of his cell, with his back toward the door, he would suddenly leap backward, turn to the left, lift the marlinespike and bring it down in an overhand swipe with such speed and force that it whistled through the air. He went through this series of moves at least a dozen times.

He lay down again, panting from the exertion, but sneering a self-satisfied sneer at the overhead bulkhead, serene in the confidence that he had rehearsed his act till he was perfect in it.

The ship had commenced to roll and the sea was sloshing and crunching against the barred porthole. More and more heavily she rolled. But it was the long, steady roll of a ship riding ground swell. Which meant that the bar off Woosong was not many hours ahead.

Presently a low rumble of voices out in the passageway told Rat-Eye that it was midnight and Kelley was being relieved.

"Your prisoner's got a bellyache," he heard Kelley say.

Rat-Eye arose and peered cautiously through the hole. It gave him a surge of satisfaction to note that "Dopey" Smithers had the mid-watch. Rat-Eye gripped his marlinespike and drew back as Dopey turned his long sleepy face toward the hole. Then Rat-Eye lay down again. It was now merely a question of waiting till the decks above became quiet, till those coming off watch had all turned into their hammocks.

At almost one o'clock, above the rumbling ship-noises, Dopey Smithers heard what sounded like the moan of a sick calf. He spoke through the hole in the door.

"Cramps," Rat-Eye groaned in reply. "I'll have to see the doctor."

Dopey was a good thinker but not a quick one. He inserted the key in the lock. Then with an afterthought—

"Turn on your light." He waited till Rat-Eye had complied before he opened the door.

Rat-Eye stood below the light, doubled over, with his back to Dopey, who remained in the doorway.

"I'll take you to the sick-bay," said Dopey.

"I cuc-can't — straighten — up," Rat-Eye groaned.

Dopey should have had better sense. He fell for it—fell hard. Thinking to give a helping hand to his stricken prisoner, he stepped inside the cell.

Dopey came over beside Rat-Eye. With the quickness of a cat Rat-Eye leaped backward. He did it all in the wink of an eye. Up came the marlinespike, then, down—*swish, crash.* The heavy end of it thudded down on Dopey's head. A roaring and starry moment, and Dopey Smithers ceased to know. He sagged down to his knees. Rat-Eye gave him a shove and he fell lengthwise on the mattress. Just once, Dopey groaned. He was out, completely.

After closing the door, Rat-Eye dropped to his knees beside the fallen gob. He jerked Dopey's gun from the holster and thrust it inside his shirt. From Dopey's pockets he frisked a small wad of money and a handkerchief. The handkerchief he stuffed in Dopey's mouth. The wound on the ill-fated gob's head was bleeding profusely, and the end of the mattress was soaked. Rat-Eye rolled him over, took off his belt and with this bound his hands behind him.

Then, he turned off the light, stepped out in the passageway and closed and locked the door.

LAST and least of Rat-Eye's worries was that of getting off the ship.

There never was a ship without her secret hiding holes. Rat-Eye Mowser knew of a nook in that ship that no one else knew. He had made that nook himself.

Far forward, abaft of the chain-locker where the anchor-chain was tiered, was a small compartment containing only an old spare kedge-anchor which stood triced up against the starboard bulkhead. One of the deck-plates in that compartment was loose, that is, not riveted down.

Rat-Eye had pried the plate up long

before and had used the bilge space underneath, a compartment spacious enough for two men, as a cache for his packages and jars of narcotics, hypodermic syringes and other such stuff, whenever he sensed suspicious eyes upon him.

Absolutely safe from discovery he could lie down in that hole. No one would ever suspect that deck-plate of being loose, for it fitted down snug, its edges flush with the adjoining plates. Only by inserting a keen instrument at its edge and forcibly prying could it be raised. It was for this that Rat-Eye had chosen the wooden marlinespike instead of one of the iron belaying-pins.

But not at once did Rat-Eye make for that hiding hole. That hole was forward, at the extreme end of this passageway. Rat-Eye went aft. Back along the dimly lighted passageway he slunk, ratwise, at a half crouch, his left hand gripping the gun under his blue shirt, in his right hand the marlinespike. He went aft to where the passageway forked, became two passageways both of which ran along outboard of the engine, fire, and dynamo-room spaces. Rat-Eye took the one to port.

He met no one down here. But, passing a door which opened off a shaft leading down into the fire-room, he heard the voices of the huskies on the fires below. This door was partly open. Reaching in, Rat-Eye rubbed the palm of his hand against the side of the shaft, which was thickly coated with coal-dust. He smeared this over his face till he was black as the blackest negro.

He ascended two ladders to the gun-deck. In a few seconds he found an iron bucket. No one recognized him with his face blackened. What few might have glimpsed him, as he scurried aft dodging below hammocks, must have taken him for merely one of the black gang on watch.

Back to the wardroom pantry went Rat-Eye. There he proceeded to make a raid. Out of the refrigerator he took a string of frankfurters, a chunk of roast pork and the half of a boiled ham. These he piled into the bucket. On top of them he dumped a platter of biscuits. Then he got under way and, steering devious courses so as to give all standing-lights a wide berth, made for that small compartment far forward and below. Arrived there, he piled his foragings on deck. Then, bucket in hand, he sallied forth to the crew's galley. From the pump therein he filled the bucket with water.

Returning below, he dropped on hands and knees and, with the pointed end of the marlinespike, pried up the loosened deck plate. Then he began stowing his supplies down in the bilge space, his hiding hole.

A loud crashing *bump*, from just above him, gave him a terrific shock and sent an icy surge up his spine. But the next moment he grinned and relaxed. The noise was made by that old spare kedge anchor which was jiggling with the ship's motion and banging against the side bulkhead, the rope lashing with which it was triced up having stretched and caused loose play.

Paying no further attention to the racket, Rat-Eye finished stowing his supplies and the bucket of water down in his hiding hole. But he did not stow himself. He had one more expedition to make. Remained to get Hongkong Whirley's roll of eight hundred dollars.

He halted, in his walk aft, at the door of the brig and listened at the hole. Silence within told him Dopey Smithers was still in the land of "*tweet-tweet*". Rat-Eye grinned and gripped the marlinespike, grinned with the thought that he would soon put Hongkong Whirley in the same place.

HONGKONG'S storeroom door was as wide open as Hongkong's mouth, when Rat-Eye cat-footed in. What with the rasping buzz-saw noises and foghorn honks that sound-sleeping tar's lungs were heaving up, Rat-Eye might as well have tramped in. The room was almost dark, the dim outer glow of only one electric bulb of low wattage, out in the passageway, barely rendering objects in the store-room perceivable. Rat-Eye

made out his man. Face up, Hongkong lay on his mattress on the chest, his head resting on a rolled-up flag, snoring away. Hongkong had turned in without removing his trousers or socks. This—those socks being on Hongkong's feet, the right one in particular—gave Rat-Eye an all's well feeling. It would save time.

One thing Rat-Eye failed to see as he tiptoed over to deal Hongkong the tap that was to send him to *tweet-tweet* land—Hongkong's iron bucket. It stood on deck within two feet of Hongkong's head. With his left toe Rat-Eye kicked it lightly, but with sufficient force to disturb its contents.

Up on the top shelf among the spare flags was a keen pair of ears. Faint as was that splash, Little Wocko heard it. Over the edge of the shelf he thrust his tiny head. Had Rat-Eye looked up then he would have seen, within arm's reach, what looked like two diamonds.

But Rat-Eye didn't look up. He was stooping over, in the act of pushing the bucket to one side, when Wocko delivered himself of the most weird and unearthly screech that Rat-Eye had ever heard. For the same reason that a woman drops her dishes when suddenly frightened, Rat-Eye let go of the marlinespike. It fell in the bucket with a splash.

Crouching, Rat-Eye was plunging his hand in the contents of the bucket—which was not clear water but water turned blood-red, three betel-nuts having been soaking in it over night—when Hongkong awoke. But Hongkong was too slow at gathering his faculties. Had he but rolled over— But all he did was lie there blinking in bewilderment. Again little Wocko let out a wild screech. By then Rat-Eye had recovered his weapon. *Crash!* It thudded on Hongkong's head and reduced his cosmos to a sprinkling of stars.

Came one more screech from Wocko, but Rat-Eye paid him no further attention. He went after Hongkong's roll of eight hundred dollars and found it, just where he looked, in Hongkong's right sock.

REMAINED only for Rat-Eye once more to scud forward, crawl down in his hole, pull the lid down over him—and stay there till it came time to make his getaway.

Getting off the ship was not going to be easy, but Rat-Eye thought he could cut it. Gobs and gobs there would be, on watch for him day and night, all over the decks. Rat-Eye's hope lay in that there were portholes down along the water-line of the *Felena's* sides, through which he could crawl. He was a good swimmer, and the river up off Shanghai was always thick with *sampans*, house-boats and other craft.

Far forward again, in that small compartment abaft of the chain-locker, Rat-Eye dropped to his knees, took the deck-plate in hand, up-ended it. The ship was now rolling heavily in the trough of the long racing mountains of ground swell, and the triced-up old spare kedge-anchor was rumbling and crashing against the starboard bulkhead.

Rat-Eye steadied himself as she lay far over to port. For a long moment she rode thus, far over on her port freeboard, deep down in a yawning watery valley. Then the next rolling mountain caught her and back she came. *Crash*, went the old anchor against the bulkhead. So abrupt was the lurch that Rat-Eye almost tumbled over. He put out his right hand to catch himself, put it palm flat against the bulkhead. And in doing that Rat-Eye overlooked a bet.

ANYHOW, Hongkong Whirley reasoned that morning, lying in a sick-bay bunk wasn't much worse than standing at a ship's wheel taking orders from a slant eyed and pigtailed pilot. These Chinese pilots always had got on Hongkong's nerves. Disregarding a lump on his head the size of a baseball, Ducky's best helmsman was resting easy with little Wocko on the pillow beside him, telling in monkey language just how it had happened. In the bunk next to them lay Dopey Smithers, in a like condition, but he, too, with a grin on his long solemn face.

But the wildest man in the ship that morning was old Ducky himself. Coming in over the bar, then all the way up the river, Ducky raged and stormed across the bridge. There was red in his blue eyes and his gray hairs stood out like needles, below the band of his cap.

"Let go!" he shouted to the boatswain down forward on the forecastle. As the anchor plunged and the chain thundered in the hawse-pipe, Ducky broke off with a broadcast snarl—

"Find me that murdering rat and I'll hang him to the yard-arm by the ears!"

Then to the boatswain he bawled—

"Fifteen fathoms of chain!"

The search for Rat-Eye had been going on since daylight. Every man off watch was in on it, and every nook and cranny large enough to hold a man had been sniffed into.

"Send me the chief master-at-arms!" Ducky bellowed for the twentieth time that morning.

Smiley came up on the bridge in a few minutes. There was a complacent grin on his fat and ruddy old face as he saluted Ducky, which Ducky thought he had no business wearing.

"Have you found him?" snapped Dickey.

"I got 'im anchored, sir," answered Smiley.

"Anchored?"

"Just that, sir. An' if you'll foller me down below, sir, I'll show you somethin' that might make you laugh."

Ducky studied his new chief master-at-arms sagely for a moment. The boatswain on the forecastle shouted—

"Fifteen fathoms at the water's edge, sir!"

"Secure!" commanded Ducky and, turning, followed Smiley below.

DEEP down into the forward part of the ship, to that small compartment abaft of the chain-locker, Smiley led Duckey.

"He's right down there, sir," said Smiley, pointing at that old spare kedge-anchor which some time in the wee hours of that morning had jerked loose from its lashings and fallen over on deck. "As I say, sir, he's anchored. See that, sir?" Smiley turned and pointed at the starboard bulkhead.

Low down near the deck, on the white enameled bulkhead, was the blood-red imprint which Rat-Eye had left there when he put out his hand to prevent tumbling over with the roll of the ship.

"That's how I come to find him, sir," Smiley went on. "When I see that, I know he ain't far away. I knew that he'd somehow doused his hand in Whirley's bucket of betelnut juice just before he walloped Whirley over the konk, because Whirley's leg, the one Mowser frisked his roll from, was all smeared over with betel juice. The doctor thought first his leg had been slashed with a knife or razor. It looked like it'd been gushin' blood, sir. Listen, sir."

Lifting his foot and bringing it down inside one of the flukes of the fallen anchor, Smiley stamped with his heel on the deck.

Rump - tump - tump - tump, came Rat-Eye's answering raps on the under side of the deck-plate.

"He's no longer anxious to hide now, sir," grinned Smiley. "He wants to get out, sir."

The glaring wrath in Ducky's eyes was now giving way to blinking mirth.

Rump - tump - tump Rat-Eye rapped.

"He-he-he!" Ducky cut loose.

"He wants to get out, sir," Smiley repeated.

"Har-har-har!" Ducky continued. He spun on his heel and started aft along the passageway, laughing as he went. He kept it up all the way up to the main deck. Heading aft on the quarter-deck he sobered a moment and turned and said:

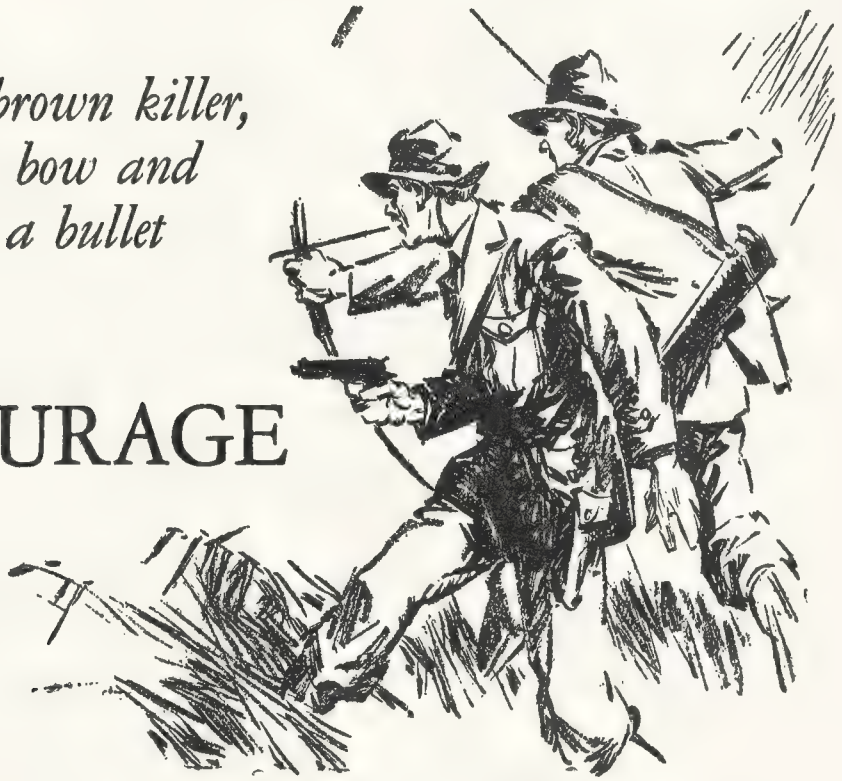
"All right, Smiley, take a few huskies down there and lift that anchor away. I'd say let him rot there, but I'm afraid it would kick up an awful smell in the ship."

"Aye, aye, sir," Smiley answered. "That I'll do, sir. Smells are bad things in ships, sir,"

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

A brown killer, a bow and a bullet

COURAGE



THE SCHOONER'S rusty anchor splashed over the side and found bottom. The Swede skipper stretched his massive shoulders and arms. Forty-eight hours of howling North Pacific gale and thirty-five hours of pea soup fog lay behind them, but an even greater problem stood ready to tax his skill. Sea was breaking over the reefs guarding Klooch Cove; a healthy surf was rolling on the steep beach. Overholt's eyes shifted from the tundra of the Alaska Peninsula to the surf, then to the skipper. He said nothing, but the Swede shook his head.

"Aye tank you get damn' gude an' vet!"

"You can't hang around here until the weather moderates," Overholt answered, "so let's take a chance. I don't mind a wetting."

The Swede nodded solemnly and gave the dory's crew instructions. The craft, peculiarly fitted for North Pacific duty, rode low. In the waterproof packs were Overholt's motion picture camera, his films and ammunition. He carried his .405 express rifle in his hands, as if afraid to trust it to the others. Even in the heavy leather case it seemed almost a part of him. A hole had been left for Overholt in the bow, and the moment the craft touched water he dropped into it. The Swede shouted down final instructions. A trail led up the cliffs, he said, and a half mile down the trail stood Burke's cabin.

Overholt knew all about Burke's cabin. Dozens of trappers remained there over night on their way to the seacoast; hunters seeking the great brown bear, often

based there. He knew, from photographs, exactly what it looked like—a strange building, constructed from the drift cast up by the sea. His mind came abruptly back to the present; the dory had cast off, the crew was rowing him ashore. They were ruddy faced Swedes who spent their lives fishing for halibut. They knew the open sea and the surf alike. They came in on the crest of a wave and shouted for Overholt to jump.

He leaped, holding the .405 express rifle with one hand high in the air; the other hand gripping the craft to steady himself and prevent being dragged down by the backwash. The water was waist deep and icy. He could feel the sand wash from under his boots. With an effort he staggered above high water mark. And all this was but an incident in the quest for "brownies".

The fishermen, with his aid, beached the craft and unloaded his supplies. With brief, unemotional farewells they returned to their schooner and she put about, a fog and sea drenched creation of wood, steel and cordage.

His guide had written Overholt that he would be waiting at Burke's cabin, but the hunter knew the man would not expect him to land at Klooch Cove. Few halibut skippers cared to put a schooner through the reefs in pea soup weather. Here, indeed, men said was the world's worst weather, but brownies thrived. Overholt made his way up the rocky trail, thanking the Swede. It had saved him a trip along the Peninsula afoot and put him ahead of another hunting party that rumor had it was after old Bloody Bill—a killer bear.

TEN MINUTES' walk through the tundra put him in sight of the cabin. Five minutes later he had reached the driftwood structure. Antuk, the guide, who had been raised in a Government school and spoke perfect English, greeted him.

"You are two days ahead of time, Mr. Overholt," he said.

It seemed strange, this perfectly spoken English, coming from a runt of a breed.

"Any one else here?"

"Yes, Whatcom!" The breed tapped his head. "He's crazy as hell!"

"So I've heard. How about Bloody Bill?"

"He's within five miles of the cabin," Antuk answered. "I've tracked him—at a safe distance." The breed's expression became reflective. "He got an Eskimo trapper last winter!"

Antuk paused for Overholt's question—

"Kill him?"

"No, just took two bites at his head, but his teeth slipped off the skull. He hasn't been the same—never will be!"

Antuk smiled. His humor was grim.

"I shouldn't think he would be!"

Burke opened the door and his Aleut squaw lighted a small fire in the path, a symbol of the warmth of their welcome. Overholt had heard of the Aleut custom. He smiled and shook hands with Burke, a strange man who had graduated from a great university and turned squawman. And yet, curiously, the veneer of civilization remained. Burke's manner was kindly, courteous, and he treated his wife as any well bred white man should. He offered no apology for her color or for the circumstances that set him down the social scale in the eyes of other white men.

"Such as we have, Mr. Overholt, is yours. You will share our guest room with Mr. Whatcom, if you don't mind. It is the best we have. My library is at your disposal, sir!"

"Thank you." He turned to Antuk. "My stuff is on the beach; will you get it up? Thanks!"

The squaw placed additional towels above the guest room wash bowl. The towels were linen, spotless and ironed. She was a fat, round faced woman, some twenty years Burke's junior and the mother of five sad eyed, well mannered halfbreeds. In her eyes Burke was a god. It struck Overholt that Burke was getting more loyalty and devotion from the native woman than many a white man outside received. Traitorous thought!

IT WAS evening when Whatcom appeared. He was a large, cold man of decided opinions. Burke performed the introduction. Overholt and Whatcom shook hands. Overholt enjoyed a strong handshake. Accepting Whatcom's hand was like gripping a dead fish, but the strength was there, as Overholt could see at a glance.

"We are roommates, Mr. Burke informs me," he said.

"Yes. Hellish country," Whatcom answered. "After brownies?"

"Yes!"

Overholt warmed up instantly. He had hunted every manner of big game but the famous Peninsula brown bear, which is the same as the Kadiak bear, though there are many who will argue the point over the camp fire. To add the pelt of a brownie to his collection had been an ambition too long deferred.

"What do you use?"

"I'm figuring on a .405 express to stop them. I'm something of a faddist on ballistics. I don't know your opinions, but they are doubtless as sound as mine anyway. I incline to a bolt action, personally. Even old Bloody Bill should stop when hit by a three hundred grain slug that's started at three thousand, three hundred foot seconds. I've some special ammunition that I may decide to use after I've seen the bear."

Overholt grinned, but the expression of friendliness died at something he saw in the other's face. Was it contempt—or what? He wondered and it made him uneasy. He slowly detected an element of superiority and his face flushed with resentment.

Then Whatcom spoke.

"Rifle, eh?" He laughed lightly. "There's no sport in a rifle. The game doesn't have a chance. Try bow and arrow!"

He pointed to as fine an archery set as Overholt had ever seen.

"With brownies?" Overholt asked incredulously.

"Why not?" Again came that light, maddening laugh. "You'll find greater courage is required to face a charging bear with bow and arrow than with rifle; and, I may add, a greater thrill is yours. A child can level a rifle at a charging bear and pump lead into the beast until it drops, but a different sort of courage is required to wait until the bear is within arrow distance and then begin shooting."

"You know what I think?" Overholt retorted, losing his temper at the other's attitude. "I think you are a plain damn' fool! Have you ever tackled a bear with that Robin Hood layout?"

"I've shot a bull moose, black bear, deer and sheep," Whatcom answered.

"But not brownies," Overholt interrupted, pacing the room nervously.

He enjoyed arguing the relative merits of fishing with bait or fly; of rifle or bow providing the affair was friendly and good sportsmanship prevailed. This man was impossible. He tried to tell himself it was foolish to permit Whatcom to arouse him this way, but doubt had been cast on his physical courage and he was ready to fight.

"My old guide killed a moose with an ax and that's rather close quarters, you'll admit, but he gave me this advice—begin shooting at brownies as soon as they're within killing range and then keep at it. They can carry a wheelbarrow load of lead and still get a man."

"He is speaking of the typical rifleman who plays safe. If you waited with a rifle, one shot would be sufficient, but that takes nerve. Pardon the personal reference, but I wait until I am certain to put my arrows in a vital spot; then one or two does the business. I can shoot almost as fast as you can operate a bolt action express."

"Nerve, eh?"

To question his nerve as Whatcom had seemed to do several times was maddening. His courage had been proven more than once. Was there a difference between courage and nerve? If so what? He could see the wide differences between courage, nerve and plain foolishness.

"Hell! I could kill a brownie—yes, even a brownie—with a .45 automatic

pistol if I was crazy enough to let him get close. You've never tackled a brownie and you don't know what you are up against. Take my advice, kill him with your Robin Hood outfit, but have a good man behind you. This argument is getting us nowhere, so let's quit."

"True, Overholt, our respective schools are violently opposed and always will be. We hold, generally speaking, the rifleman lacks courage; not moral, not even physical courage, but the courage to let a charging animal have a fair chance."

"Huh! One charging brownie will argue you out of that idea," Overholt snorted.

"Perhaps you would like to accompany me tomorrow when I drop Bloody Bill!"

"I'll be there, Whatcom. Shall I bring my rifle along?"

"Not on my account, but if your courage needs—ah—stimulation, bring it by all means."

To cool off, Overholt stepped outside.

"Whatcom's a perfect example of what fad and success will do for a man. He's shot moose and other big game and thinks he's invincible and anybody who don't use a bow and arrow is a rotten sportsman."

He returned to the cabin, set up his motion picture camera and instructed Antuk in the art of pressing the button.

"Just press and the camera will do the rest!"

"I understand," the native answered. "I have operated them for other hunters."

"Good. Then you'll know what to get. I want a picture of a man killing a brown bear with bow and arrow. If he fails, I want that, too. I'll be at hand with my rifle. You'd better have yours along in case mine doesn't go off—or something."

THE FOLLOWING morning they breakfasted in a room resembling a ship's cabin. Burke had stripped the hardwood and furnishings from the wreck of a clipper ship ending its days as a cannery tender and the result was remarkable. Even portholes were cut to create the impression of being on shipboard. From the center an oil lamp was suspended; a ship's clock struck bells every half hour.

The men ate in silence. There was a tenseness that every one noticed and Burke's "Good luck, boys!" held a rather grim note.

The bears were hanging along the streams now, the berry season being practically over, the salmon run still on. Great paws knocked the fish ashore and the banks and matted grass were stained red. Bloody Bill's trail was evident enough. No other bear in the vicinity left a footprint so large. It led down to the stream where the rocks were worn smooth from many generations of fishing bear, followed the course for nearly a mile, then doubled back into the tundra. Antuk, scouting ahead, returned in a state of considerable excitement.

"Right below the ridge with two smaller bears," he announced. "Mr. Whatcom, please don't shoot him with the arrows. It'll just make him mad, and there are no trees to climb."

The native wormed his way through the grass and set up the camera where it would command the situation. He was displaying some courage himself, incidentally, as he worked nearer and caught several feet of the group.

Five minutes elapsed before Whatcom had worked himself in a position. Suddenly he stood up. Five feet away Overholt crouched in the grass, just his head visible. Slowly the great bear swung around and the bow string twanged. The shaft sped true and struck the bear in the side. Whatcom was tense, but he looked quickly at Overholt, then at the bear, as if expecting the creature to fall. Astounded at first, the animal had snarled. Then with a roar he bit at the arrow and snapped it in two. Just a stub protruded from the wound.

HIS EYES searched for the enemy, but the nose caught the direction first. Up the hill he lumbered, then seeing the man, charged. The arrows that followed buried their heads deep in his

flesh and muscles. At each impact he would snarl and bite at the spot, then continue the charge. The smaller bears were flying in terror, but Bloody Bill who had killed more than one man seemed to know the way to safety is attack, not retreat.

Whatcom shot beautifully, as Overholt acknowledged generously. With a quick arm movement, his hand went over his shoulder to the quiver, caught an arrow and dropped in into place. Aim and fire followed so quickly the eye could hardly see the movements. Whatcom's face grew pale. He gathered himself for a tremendous effort and the arrow sunk so deeply into the bear's body that only the feathers remained visible. And still he came!

"God, Overholt, the rifle. I can't stop him!"

The camera caught every expression on the archer's face. Overholt smiled grimly. Never again would Whatcom ridicule those who hunted big game with rifles.

"Overholt, the rifle!"

Two arrows remained.

"I can't stop him, man!"

"You've got to stop, him," Overholt cried. "The rifle is not loaded."

Perspiration was pouring from Overholt's face, though the morning was cold. His nerve had been questioned, and foolish though he might be, he had faced the bear, with an empty rifle, sensing what might happen.

Gray as death Whatcom launched the two last arrows, turned and, with a cry of terror, fled. The great bear would have knocked the archer to earth but for Overholt's sudden act in leaping up when he was but thirty feet off. In his right hand he held an automatic pistol; another, loaded, was ready in his left.

"Antuk!" he shouted. "Let him have it! Pump it into him!"

The native's voice came back, tense with desperation.

"My gun's jammed!"

It was Overholt's turn to fight off the strange rush of fear such as had gripped Whatcom. He, too, was leaning on a broken reed. He wondered whether he had the steadiness of hands he had often told himself was his in so tight a situation. The right hand that lifted the automatic was steady enough when he raised it. From the muzzle streamed the nickel slugs.

The weapon dropped, and into Overholt's hand came the second. It leaped again and again. The bear's head changed from the steady impact as bullets struck and glanced off. But those that vanished within the great mouth were those that told. The spinal column splintered; the legs gave way, moved convulsively and stopped.

With an effort Overholt retained his nerve. Slowly he drew his skinning knife and approached the bear. Two men came toward him—Antuk with the camera; Whatcom with the bow. The native was shouting:

"I got every bit of it. It's great, Mr. Overholt!"

"Yes," Whatcom muttered, "it's all down there; my failure, my retreat, Overholt's killing a brownie with an automatic pistol when I failed, saving my life. Lord, what a dose to swallow! He'll make the most of it. Every sportsman in the country will see that picture."

Well, he had proven his point, the only way to tackle a brownie was with a rifle. That damning film, was there no way to stop it. It was worth trying.

"Overholt! Congratulations. You have your motion picture record to prove your courage and my failure. What's the film worth to you?"

"You want to buy it?" Overholt paused in his skinning.

"Yes!"

"How much?"

"I'll go as high as ten thousand dollars!"

Overholt grunted.

"You couldn't touch it for fifty thousand dollars. Think I want every sportsman in the country to know I was crazy enough to tackle a brownie with an automatic pistol?"

JNCO

By GEORGES SURDEZ

THREE stout poles, lower ends braced on the ground in a triangular pattern, the tops meeting to form a great tripod of wood, made a sort of gibbet. Head bared to the Saharan sun, a man hung from its center, supported by ropes passed beneath his arms, wrists shackled together behind his back. His legs were bound to a bag of sand, weighing, at a rough estimate, fifty pounds. The toes swung a few inches clear of the soil.

"Who is that, Sergeant?" Belval asked.

"That, Lieutenant?" Sergeant-Major Dubois smiled. "That's Bergeret." He pronounced the name as one might speak of a famous man. "Bergeret, the guy who bawled out the inspector, the colonel, everybody."

In Bergeret's congested, purplish face, ironical blue eyes gleamed.

"How do you do, young fellow?" he addressed the officer.

Belval turned to Dubois.

"Did the captain order this?"

"He told me to use all necessary measures, Lieutenant. Bergeret is a bad egg."

"Take him down at once!" Belval snapped.

Dubois in turn barked an order; several men left the rockpiles where they had been working, freed Bergeret. The prisoner sank to the ground, rubbing his ankles and knees, looking up wryly at the young officer. Not much above average in height, endowed with a compact, well muscled frame, his tanned face now lit by mild eyes of almost violet blue, Bergeret revealed no facial deformity, no scars, nothing to evidence possible vice or great tendency toward evil.

"Don't string him up again," Belval resumed, "unless you get formal orders from either the captain or myself. Understood?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Thanks a lot," Bergeret spoke up. "How about something to eat? Nothing but bread and water for the last week."

"Give him food," the lieutenant ordered. He turned away with a sickening revulsion for what he had seen. Somehow, he believed that what he had read of the African punishment camps

A Complete Novelette of the French Colonial Troops in Africa

dealt with the past alone, that things had changed.

Sergeant-Major Dubois followed him, seeking to justify himself.

"He never called you 'Lieutenant'," he pointed out. "That's what gets him into trouble. Says he doesn't believe in titles—that one man is the equal of any other."

"Must be mad," Belval suggested.

"The medical board says he isn't. Just won't give in. And we can't have that sort out here. Men must buckle or break. Otherwise nobody's safe."

Belval shrugged slightly, mounted his horse, ordered the detachment to move on. The hobnailed boots churned the thick dust once more. The camp, a dozen tents inclosed in a sketchy wall of spiny bushes, was soon lost to view behind a swell of the nude plain. The lieutenant rode his small native horse at the rear, well out of the dust.

The men before him were soldiers, for they wore the white fatigue uniforms of the French army, bore rifles, bayonets, carried packs. Yet the two sergeants striding on the flanks, pistol holster snug against the right hip, seemed to herd them rather than lead them forward. Since morning, these men had marched twenty-odd miles, the final lap between Fom-Tattawin and Sidi-Okba, outposts of France on the Tunisia-Tripolitania frontier.

Their destination, somewhere in the quivering haze ahead, Sidi-Okba, headquarters of the Disciplinary Section of the Sixth Battalion, Light Infantry of Africa.

UPON a gestured invitation from Captain Lagnac, Belval took a chair near the table which occupied the center of the small room. His new chief glanced rapidly through the papers concerning the draft of men brought in by the lieutenant. Through the open door, Belval could see the yard of the post, a pool of dazzling light and powdery sand. On the opposite side, hugging the defensive wall, straggled a low row of unpainted shacks, the privates' quarters.

The two officers contrasted sharply.

Belval was slim, wiry, his face but slightly touched by the sun. Captain Lagnac was a leathery veteran, whose graying mustache concealed full, meaty lips. On his wrinkled khaki tunic, worn thin by many launderings, gleamed the enameled star of the Legion of Honor, the War Cross and the Colonial Medal bearing on its blue and white ribbon the Madagascar and Saharan clasps. He rolled a cigaret thoughtfully between his thick fingers.

"How old are you, Belval?"

"Twenty-four, Captain."

"And what brought you here?"

"I was wounded, three months ago, at the front. When I got on my feet again, I discovered I was assigned to this place, that's all."

"You didn't know the post?" Lagnac sighed. "You will. I don't believe, even though you've been in the trenches, that this will prove a rest cure."

"I'm ready to take the bad with the good, Captain."

"No doubt. I see by your papers that you were in a crack regiment in France. You are now an officer in the Sixth Battalion of Light Infantry of Africa—in the *Bat' d' Af'*. Do you realize to the full what that means?"

"I know what I've heard—and read, Captain."

"You've heard that the *Bat' d' Af'* receives in its ranks the conscripts of France deemed unfit to mingle with normal youths. One may be certain that each man, upon arrival, has served a minimum of six months in prison before being called to the colors. But this Disciplinary Section is composed of those who have proved themselves unfit to mingle with the normal run of men in the *Bat' d' Af'*.

The lieutenant who preceded you left, on sick leave. In reality, heartbroken. We have all the toughs from the Battalion —the malingerers, the incorrigibles. Hard —hard—but some one must do it. You have a very evil period of adjustment ahead of you—until you grow ruthless, callous. For I expect you have a normal dose of pity."

Belval had heard of Lagnac's severity, knew that he was called "The Tiger" by his charges. Seen with nothing wider than the top of the table between, he seemed very human, a trifle worn, with tired lines in his face.

"I rather fear, Captain, that I have already started upon a beginner's errors." Belval went on to explain his meeting with Bergeret, gave the details leading to his order to release the man.

"I have been among them for years, yet I often feel qualms of conscience. Can't be helped, however. Those who accuse us of cruelty little realize how much it costs a man with a decent streak to fall back upon torture as the only means to obtain obedience and order." Lagnac lifted one arm bruskly, indicated the scribe, a private, seated before a typewriter at a small table in a corner. "I made the mistake of trusting that one, and he forged my signature on passes for his comrades—at so much per forgery. Stand up, Louis, and tell the Lieutenant why you did it."

"I don't know," Louis confessed. "Plain bad, I guess, Captain."

"I forgave him, and he'll do it again. Next time, though, he'll face court martial. Now, Louis, get out and leave us at peace." When the door had closed behind the scribe, Lagnac went on, "He's a good sample. I pulled him out of the ranks because I pitied him, gave him this soft job. Gratitude? Repeats everything he hears in here, steals whatever he can lay his hands on.

"As for Bergeret, I have his record. Know it by heart. Bergeret, first name Jean, age thirty-three, born in Rouen. Jail before coming here, a scintillating succession of punishments for various crimes since, an endless procession of days in cell, convictions, trips to the penal camps. Came to the Battalion twelve years ago for the customary two years. Through his fault, he's served twelve—"

"A pretty case, Captain."

"A type, that man. An 'Inco', as the incorrigibles proudly call themselves. Came here from Penal Camp No. 3 a few

weeks ago. Already has caused more trouble than he's worth. Of course, whenever he misbehaves, I could lengthen his term of imprisonment, to be served after the war. Or send him before a court martial, apply the letter of the law concerning disobedience in war time and have him shot. I have an aversion, however, to that. I cling to hope of reform, so, to keep him tamed while here, I had to resort to physical punishment."

Belval felt the quiet explanation more than he would have a verbal reproof. He shifted uneasily in his chair:

"I don't understand why he behaves as he does."

"I have gone to the length of investigating his past, in the hope of discovering some clue as to how he might be salvaged. His father was a dock laborer on the river wharves of Rouen. A strong breed, those Normans, but undermined by alcoholism. Bergeret went to work in the same gang as his father as soon as he was strong enough to do a man's work. Stole sheets of copper from a barge, was caught, condemned, went to jail, and wound up down here when his time came to serve in the army.

"Both father and mother rotten with alcohol. Probably Bergeret was taken care of like the other kids in his sort of surroundings: Little milk, black coffee three times a day, with a dash of gut-twister booze to make him sleep sweetly and keep him out of harm's way while his mother went out to work as charwoman."

"Alcohol doesn't do a kid's brain any good."

"Trouble is, he's not crazy enough to be locked up in an asylum, nor sensible enough to get along in life."

"Doesn't seem to be his fault, Captain," Belval said.

"No. But neither is it mine, yours, the sergeants' nor his comrades'. Rotten with half baked socialist ideas, Bergeret seems to have a strange influence over the other men. He has incited to mutiny everywhere he's been. Dangerous in a prison camp, a tendency to rebellion becomes more so in this group, with guns and cartridges in the hands of the men. My ideal is not to end shot in the back, you know."

"Why not simply clamp him in a cell?" Belval asked.

"Doesn't fear a cell. Likes it—keeps him from work. I told him I'd keep him with the road gang, where he'd either work or wish he was working. Personally, I don't care whether he works or not, but he's boasted he wouldn't do a stroke, and the devil take me if he has! Laughs at the silo—another chance to loaf. I've forbidden the sergeants to strike him—he'd play sick and get into the hospital. But he's made uncomfortable while not working, which may explain what you saw. But enough of him. You are familiar with the military situation here?"

"I studied it a bit on the way down."

"Nothing cheerful. When the war started, a couple of years ago, things were pretty quiet for us along the Saharan border. Then the Arabs, urged by German propaganda on one hand, by Senussi emissaries on the other, rose against the Italians, who, following the war against Turkey had penetrated into the hinterland of Tripolitania. Things happened quickly. The garrisons at Mursuk and Ubari were massacred.

"We managed to save Ghat by opening our forts to the Italians for shelter. The natives captured modern rifles by the thousand, machine guns, a few seventy-millimeter field pieces and ammunition. Well armed, flushed by success, led and trained by men who had seen service against the Italians a couple of years before, also by German agents who appeared out of nowhere in particular when needed, they turned on us and damned near licked us before we realized something had gone wrong.

"No longer ago than last month, there were twenty-five hundred *bicos* with two cannon surrounding this camp. I have here, beside the *Bat' d' Af'* contingent, a full company of Territorial Infantrymen; not the best soldiers in the world as far as age, strength and endurance are concerned, but willing. I held out decently,

killed off the slobs as fast as could be managed. Some three hundred of them buried in the sand between here and the camp of Dubois—you probably smelled them—they're in shallow. Our Incos, who, I must admit, helped in picking them off, buried them. A flying column from Fom-Tittawin drove the others away. But they'll come back again.

"I have definite information from our spies that another bunch is gathering across the border, meaning to get our hides on the next try. I'm thinking of placing you, with fifty men, at the nearest waterhole, thirty miles southwest. The Arabs used it last time, and they will try to do so again; without it they cannot linger around long. There's a sort of a redoubt erected there that can be completed in a few hours. Hell of a lonely dump, but we have no choice."

"I'm ready to start any time, Captain," Belval asserted.

"Eh? Not so fast. I want you to get the men in hand first. Two or three weeks from now we'll speak of it again." Lagnac drew a sheet of paper from a drawer; wrote rapidly. "An order of the day," he said. "I lift all punishments inflicted within the post, including Bergeret's. The draft you brought here is already installed. I'll introduce you to the lieutenant commanding the Territorials." The captain laid a friendly hand on the young man's shoulder. "Don't worry. Everything will be all right. Just take matters as they come."

Belval followed Lagnac outside for the tour of inspection that was invariably offered a new arrival in an outpost.

THERE was not long to wait for the result of Lagnac's forgiveness. The slight relaxation of the hand holding the reins at Sidi-Okba was interpreted as weakness, as a concession to insubordination. From dawn to night, the pleas and curses of the sergeants resounded in the yard. On the third night, the *Bat' d' Af'* men were rioting in the shacks, fighting among themselves.

Four of them were discovered outside the post, having in some mysterious manner avoided the sentries to seek adventure in a native encampment near by. Belval, present at their arrest, present also when the sergeants quelled the riot in the barracks, could scarcely believe his eyes. By the afternoon of the fourth day, the men who had been undergoing punishment were again in cells, ankles caught in leg irons. With the sole exception of Jean Bergeret who, to the stupefaction of all who knew him, seemed to have turned over a new leaf.

Bergeret was working! Not laboring hard, but holding a pick which he swung without enthusiasm, up, down, up, down. So satisfied were the sergeants that they overlooked his other failings, reinstated him to the dignity of bearing arms. Bergeret drilled with tolerable accuracy when placed in the squad.

"I don't trust him," Captain Lagnac said. "I gather nothing good from his polite smirk. He has some scheme under way."

"Perhaps he's cured," Belval stated hopefully. "That last day, holding up that sandbag, may have made him doubt his ability to cope with the entire army. He was certainly blue in the face."

"I hope so." Lagnac was doubtful. "By the way, I've been investigating the escapade of those fellows who went into the native camp. The four of them were drunk as lords, and it's a wonder they got away with only a few slashes. I checked up the wine supply for the men. Not enough missing to put those fellows in the condition they were found. But my private stock, Belval, my private stock! Little wonder they were ardent. They had been rinsing their throats with vintage wines and liqueurs. Again it was my protégé, Louis."

"I noticed a new man had taken his place in the office, Captain."

"He's in a cell until I can send him north for a court martial. I'm tired of it. He's had sufficient warning. It's not only the financial loss, but it makes me appear a fool. My men drunk on my own private stock!"

THE CAPTAIN had always scrupulously avoided intruding on the new officer's privacy; but one morning, a few days later, he entered the lieutenant's room hastily. He was paler than usual.

"Here's more trouble," he said. "Louis has committed suicide. Hanged himself from the bars of his cell. Dubois found him this morning and called me in. Dead three or four hours. A hell of a sight before breakfast." Fortified by three fingers' breadth of cognac in a tumbler, Lagnac recovered his poise. "Feared court martial."

"As well out of the way," Belval said callously.

"Yes. But still, I'm a bit sorry I pushed him to it. Come to the office, we'll get his papers together. His mother wrote direct to me, and I forgot my better judgment. I'll never get interested in one of the wretches again!"

Dubois had placed the letters found in Louis' cell on the captain's table. The first, to his mother in France. Belval read on to the end. Louis, in the intensity of the cerebral commotion that had led to his act, had written a touching, manly letter. The bleak, pathetic hopelessness that the lieutenant had read in the men's eyes was spread before him now in the firm precise writing of the scribe.

"And this—" Lagnac held out a second letter—"is a sentimental farewell addressed to me and his comrades. I shall not read it to the men. That would achieve just what Louis sought, a bit of importance after his death." He picked up a pen and wrote rapidly. "An order of the day, Belval, which will snap this up and place the whole occurrence in the true light."

The first draft was handed to the scribe, who typed it without a flicker of expression on his shaven face.

ORDER OF THE DAY NO. 1457—

Private Guitron, Louis, has taken his own life to avoid the just consequence of his deeds. The Captain calls attention that suicide has always been considered a cowardly act. Guitron, Louis, deserves no more than a coward's burial. He will not be granted military honor nor buried with the men of his unit in the cemetery. His comrades will not follow him to his final resting place. The corpse will be taken in a wheelbarrow to a hole into which it will be thrown. A sergeant on duty will make certain that the carcass is disposed of.

—CAPTAIN LAGNAC.

"Pretty stiff," Belval commented, shocked by the intended coarseness of expression, so different from the captain's usual speech.

"I know it," Lagnac admitted, "but it's necessary. Above all, the privates in the *Bat' D' Af'* love to attract attention. Grant Louis the funeral given to others, have him followed to his grave by the whole garrison, allow the men to make pretty speeches and he will have imitators. We would have an epidemic of suicides. I have seen it before. Seven men took the leap in thirty days. Finally the captain in command made public his intention to bury the next suicide like a dog, after a preliminary exposure on a dung heap for two days. Suicides ended."

"Yes, and let three or four suicides occur and we'll have the press in France accusing us of driving our men to it," Belval agreed.

"The percentage of suicides is less in the *Bat' d' Af'* than in the Foreign Legion, the native infantry—even less than in the Algerian regiments composed of normal Frenchmen, but that means nothing to the howlers."

Lagnac stepped to the door, called for Dubois.

"Get all the section men out, even those in the cells. When they're assembled, read off this order, then stick it up where those who care can read it at leisure. As for burial, carry out the instructions to the letter. Permit no manifestations of sympathy. You've seen suicides spread through a camp before, haven't you, Dubois?"

"Once, Captain. It was terrible. They seemed to do it to spite us."

"To prove my indifference," Lagnac resumed after the sergeant-major had left, "I'm going off for the day, to inspect the road gangs north of here. Act as if nothing has happened."

THE ASSEMBLED section listened to the announcement meekly. The road gangs left soon after, with Lagnac. Toward three in the afternoon, Belval saw through the window of the office a strange procession crossing the yard. A rough board coffin was laid atop a wheelbarrow. A ragged, dirty native pushed, while another, equally filthy of burnous and turban, held the box in place. The improvised hearse bearing Private Louis Guitron to his last resting place passed twenty feet from the section drilling near the south gate. The sharp orders of the sergeant did not cease. Not a head turned in the direction of the coffin. Strolling behind, in a fatigue uniform, strap of *képi* tight around his jaw to bear evidence that he was merely fulfilling a chore, came Sergeant-Major Dubois.

After "lights out" had sounded that night the non-coms were on the alert. Belval stayed up late in the dining room, a loaded revolver in the table drawer, laid among the silverware. At midnight Dubois reported all quiet. Louis, he said, had been known as a thief and an informer, envied because of his soft job in the office. No one regretted him.

"We worked hard today; they're tired out," concluded the sergeant-major. "Just the same, I wish the captain was back."

THE FOLLOWING morning Belval was awakened by the arrival of the Territorial officer, Lieutenant Allars, his junior in command.

"Belval—Belval!"

"What's wrong?"

"Your men have beat it—the whole bunch with their arms."

"Didn't you try to stop them?"

"They were out of the walls before I was warned, Belval. The sergeants are locked up in the cells!"

Belval dressed hastily, found the duplicate keys in the office and let out the non-coms of the *Bat' d' Af'* section who were locked in the jail.

"They got me in bed, next door," Dubois explained. "Threw me in here, where I found the others. It took me thirty minutes' yelling to attract the attention of the nearest Territorial sentry."

"There's so much yelling going on all the time," Allars protested stiffly, "that my men can not be expected to pay much attention."

Allars affected an English cut uniform with many patch-pockets, flaps and tan belting. A notary in a provincial town in peace time, he never appeared to have quite understood by what miracle he found himself an officer in Tunisia.

"Where are the men, Dubois?" Belval asked.

"Don't know. They've tried things like this before but never got away with it so well. They took our revolvers—"

"I'll supply weapons," Allars suggested, "and come along with a section of my own."

"I accept the revolvers," Belval said. "For the rest, this is a personal affair—to be settled by myself."

He armed his small group of non-coms from the Territorials' racks—revolvers, rifles and bayonets.

"I'll catch up with them and bring them back, Allars," he concluded. "They can't have gone far. You're in charge here. If the captain gets back before I do tell him everything."

Hoping that he could extricate himself from his ridiculous plight before Lagnac's return, Belval ran forward with his panting escorts. They did not have far to go. The men were in sight, massed compactly around Louis Guitron's grave.

The mound was covered with fresh cut leaves. The men waited until Belval was within ten yards, then brought up their rifles, fixed bayonets glittering in the sun, to halt him. Bergeret, rifle in hand, looking more the soldier than ever before, stepped forward.

"End this nonsense and get back to the post!" Belval ordered.

"When the ceremony is completed," Bergeret said placidly. "When proper respect has been shown *our dead*."

"This is war time, Bergeret!" Belval warned. "You are disobeying the cap-

tain's orders. You know what that means."

"Yes. But we are free men." Bergeret placed the butt of his rifle on the ground, leaned gracefully upon the crossguard of the bayonet, evidently enjoying the temporary position as master. "When an officer commits suicide the affair is hushed up. They say it was momentary insanity—or a question of honor. He is thrown into his hole with military honors. The carcass is followed by bands and troops.

"One hundred twenty-six years ago our ancestors proclaimed all men free and equal. We are obeying the laws—not the laws of the army, but the laws of France. More, we obey the law of universal brotherhood. To us Louis was a man, as much as any officer. His code of honor was his own. I have seen officers, who have bumped themselves off after being caught misusing funds, buried with all honors. I claim before God and before men the same right for Louis. I claim—"

Belval interrupted the tirade by drawing his revolver.

"That's enough, Bergeret. I give you two minutes to give in before I order my men to fire. And the first to go will be you."

"That's not important." Bergeret smirked insolently. "What I have done today will be heard of. I advise you to be patient. There is one more speech to be made in the memory of Comrade Louis; then we'll march back of our own free will."

Belval lowered the revolver, brought his watch from the vest pocket of his tunic.

"Your turn, comrade," Bergeret addressed one of the men.

The private laid his rifle on the ground, bared his shaven head to the sun, holding the cloth *képi* over his heart. He cleared his throat importantly.

The second hand on Belval's watch crept steadily on the tiny indented dial framed in the larger enameled plate. Upon him, he knew, the men's glances were fastened, mocking glances. They knew him to be young. He it was who had freed Bergeret, the Inco. Too young, too soft to shoot.

"We are gathered at this moment," the speaker said, "with bleeding hearts and tremulous lips, to speak a last word of farewell to you, Louis, our beloved comrade."

The second hand pulsed jerkily from black marker to black marker. In Belval's palm the hard butt of the revolver was moist.

"Louis, you bore your suffering stoically, until, at last—"

Instead of pressing the trigger, Belval swung the revolver, threw it fiercely at Bergeret's head. Bergeret's mouth opened, he lurched uncertainly, bent at the knees, collapsed. The lieutenant picked up the revolver. No one moved.

"Attention!" he cried. His voice was clear, cold. With satisfaction, he saw the men before him stiffen, long habit of absolute obedience asserting itself. "Sacred God! When I say a thing, I mean it! You—you with the big mouth—back in the rank! Right shoulder, arms!"

The difficult moment had passed. Dubois and the other sergeants took advantage of the hesitation, regained their grip over the privates.

"Dubois, detail two men to bring Bergeret in," Belval ordered, as he slid the heavy service weapon back into the holster.

"Not much hurt," Dubois commented. "A good throw, nevertheless."

LAGNAC was of the same opinion when he returned late in the afternoon.

"Rather comical that you, who freed Bergeret a few days ago, should be the man to drop him," he said. "Well, you're established among us. What is your opinion? Should we press charges against him, which means death?"

"No, Captain. I think he's tamed. Lost prestige."

"Just as well. I'd have to send you and Dubois as witnesses, several of the men as accomplices. There's to be nobody left

down here. And Heaven knows, we'll need men." Lagnac tapped a typewritten report. "A strong *harka* is preparing for action against us in Tripolitania. Three thousand and more. Cannon. Our spies claim there is a German officer with them. Possibly. Last time, a Turk offered me terms in beautiful French.

"It is claimed that several bands, from fifty to two hundred strong, are already across on our side, reconnoitering. You'll take the section and occupy that waterhole I spoke of. You should have no trouble after today. Avoid conflict in the open, with the bands of Arabs. Get behind those walls, stick behind them. We must give the natives no victories, or the news will spread, and we'll have the whole Sahara on us. The loyalty of the Tuareg is hanging by a hair. In my opinion, you can hold the redoubt there against any number. Of course, it would be nasty if they bring up field guns."

"I've been under shellfire before, Captain."

"I know. I trust you. Start in the morning."

A few minutes later, Belval faced the section on the drill field. The men had drawn up in two lines. Upon a brief order from Dubois, knapsacks were laid on the ground, opened. Buttplates and bolts had been polished and greased. The specified number of cartridges were in the pouches. Here and there a belt buckle was dull, a tunic dingy. The lieutenant made the necessary comments. He halted before Bergeret, who wore a moist bandage around his head.

"You're given another chance, Bergeret. The last. You are expected to do your duty as a Frenchman."

"All right," Bergeret replied laconically.

"Would the word "lieutenant" scorch your tongue?"

"I recognize no such title. I am a free citizen—no more, no less than yourself."

The nearest man laughed softly. But it seemed to Belval that they were amused at Bergeret's stupidity.

"All right, Bergeret," Belval said, smiling. "We'll pass over your pet mania." He called for attention and addressed the men: "I have not been among you long. I'm told you have certain shortcomings—" He paused, waited for the answering grin. "But I have always heard that you have proved good soldiers under fire. Captain Lagnac, who has seen you in action before, assures me that you will not make me regret the men who fought at my side in the trenches, in spite of your recent error. We are to occupy a vital spot in the defense of the frontier, south of here. A responsible post, a post of danger. We start in the morning. To those who are self-respecting soldiers I have nothing to add. The others can glance at Bergeret. Dismissed."

BENEATH the long visors were grooved, worn faces, dustsmeared masks. Against the raw white of the neckcloths, lean, muscular jaws stood out, startlingly. The regular tread of the *Bat' d' Af'* detachment, bound south, lifted the fine dust from the sunbaked earth. A continuous, irritating tinkling sounded, the sharp touch of bayonet scabbard on tin cups. Behind followed fifteen mules laden with foodstuffs and ammunition, urged on by screaming native drivers.

Long since songs had died out, as the weight of rifles increased, and knapsacks' straps sank into weary shoulders. Occasionally a man stumbled, reeled, seemed about to drop into the swirling dust. Then one of the sergeants would race forward, shouting hoarsely, and the laggard was galvanized into added effort.

Belval had dismounted, to preach endurance by example. An orderly led his horse, behind the detachment. On the lieutenant's right strode the guide, a lean Arab youth, born in the vicinity. On the other side, Sergeant-Major Dubois plodded, discontented, perspiring.

"Can't tell me this pounding out kilometer after kilometer under this sun and in this dust is good for any man, Lieutenant. They should have some means of transportation out here, besides a guy's feet."

"A railway?" Belval queried. "Fine time to build one, when men and money are needed at the front!"

"Automobiles, then, Lieutenant."

"I suppose you'd train them to leap across gullies, Dubois."

"Didn't think of the gullies," Dubois admitted. He reflected for a few minutes. "They tell us in the newspapers we have big airplanes to bomb German cities. A half dozen of them, carrying men instead of bombs—"

"What about gasoline? It would have to be brought down from the railroad's end at Gabes on camels. Soldiers would have to escort the camels, so some one would walk." Belval indicated the rugged plain. "Suppose you crashed."

"True," Dubois agreed once more.

The detachment had scarcely reached the midway mark of its journey. The lieutenant had proceeded cautiously, avoiding the best known trails. Before he left, he had been informed by Lagnac of new developments just learned by courier: Roaming between Sidi-Okba and the redoubt were two hundred and fifty men, armed with Italian rifles.

"About time for the hourly halt, Lieutenant?" Dubois asked.

"Right," Belval assented, after a glance of his watch.

He lifted his hand, signaled for the ten minute rest period. Knapsacks thumped to the ground; weary men sank, many taking the opportunity to moisten their mouths with short pulls at the canteens, the mules and their drivers closed in.

With his customary disregard for regulations, Bergeret had discarded his boots, traveled in native sandals. Whether because of greater inherited endurance or longer experience in North Africa, he had stood the march better than his comrades. He smiled when he caught the lieutenant's glance upon him, a soft, annoying smirk.

"Get up, boys!" Belval urged, when the ten minutes had passed and the warning blast of the whistle had sounded.

The march was resumed without enthusiasm. Belval, hot, aching, was tempted to climb back in the saddle.

"Eh, Gallet," he called out, "give us a song. Not too loud."

Gallet was a tall, raw boned Gascon of twenty-six, brownskinned, black haired, with an amiable, cheerful grin. During the morning hike, in the first elation of finding himself in the open, he had sung. Before coming to the *Bat' d' Af'* he had been a music hall artist, save for the few months spent "in the shade" for appropriating a fellow performer's savings.

"Une belle dame vint à passer,
Dans son beau carrosse doré,
Et elle lui dit: 'Beau cantonnier,
Tu fais un fichu métier—' "

A hum rose from the tired soldiers, mournful in spite of the swing rhythm.

" 'White Wing,' said the lady comely,
From her coach with gold inlaid,
'Though your looks are far from homely,
Yours is a hell of a trade.' "

The men were stumbling often now despite efforts of sergeants to preserve a compact formation.

Dubois had dropped back toward the rear to round up the stragglers.

A FEW minutes later the lieutenant felt a touch on his elbow. He turned, expecting to see Dubois. Instead, Bergeret was standing at his side. The noncoms, four in number, were surrounded by their men, disarmed. Baggage lay on the ground in scattered heaps, abandoned by the mule drivers, fleeing with their animals. A wrench at his side warned Belval that his revolver had been torn from the holster.

"Don't fret," Bergeret advised him. "No harm will be done you."

"What's all this?" Belval asked with as much assurance as he could exhibit.

"This?" Bergeret mimicked his tone, his expression. "Nothing, young man, nothing. Only—this time you haven't your revolver."

"What do you hope to do?" Belval asked quietly.

"Assert our rights as free men."

"How long do you expect to get away with this, Bergeret?"

"For the rest of my life." Bergeret called Gallet. The tenor came forward, rifle in hand. "Watch Belval, Gallet. If he tries to join the sergeants, shoot."

"All right," Gallet agreed. He slid the breech-lock back, showed Belval that the weapon was loaded. "If you think I'll hesitate, just try it."

"From thief to murderer," Belval said.

"We're not assassins," Bergeret protested, "but free men kill to keep freedom. We've had enough."

"We've had enough," Gallet repeated immediately.

"All right, comrades," Bergeret called out. "We camp here."

"I have given no order to camp," Belval reminded him. "You still have time to reconsider."

"You could bluff us back at the post, with the company of Territorials ready to come after us if we showed fight. Here, you're alone—no longer boss."

Bergeret laughed.

"You're chancing the firing squad, all of you."

"Bah! Why is it worse to be shot by Frenchmen than by Arabs?"

"A trifling question of honor and self-respect," Belval replied, "doubtless beyond your comprehension."

"You said it," Bergeret agreed. He had one of the men bring up Belval's baggage, all save his weapons. "We're not thieves, either. Here's your stuff. Make yourself comfortable. But first, give me your parole not to misbehave."

"No."

Bergeret shrugged, spoke to Gallet. A set of irons was brought from the baggage—manacles, anklets. Knowing the uselessness of further resistance, Belval held out his wrists.

"First act of free men," he pointed out, "to chain others."

Bergeret threw the irons down.

"By God, we won't! Listen, Belval, this isn't revenge."

"What are you worrying about? My opinion?"

"In a way. What you did against us—that was part of your job, what you were paid for. Got no fun out of it. I don't forget you had me taken down. Dubois is a brute, but even he, we won't hurt him either."

"What are your plans, then? What about that bunch of Arabs hanging around here?"

"We'll make terms with them—surrender. In a way, Belval, we're doing you a favor. You've got a wound stripe already. But you're young, and *they'd* probably ship you back into the trenches before the slaughtering is finished. The Arabs will take you prisoner, keep you safe until the end of the war."

"Unless they cut off my head," Belval objected.

"Little of that stuff pulled now. They're pretty well led, fight according to your rules."

"I have my doubts. But what does my head matter to you, Bergeret?"

"You seemed to worry about mine, awhile back."

THE MEN camped around the group formed by the lieutenant, Bergeret and Gallet. Dubois and the other noncoms were on the outskirts, guarded by three men with bayoneted rifles. Belval arranged his blankets, whistling softly, keeping one eye on Bergeret, who had sat down on his knapsack nearby and lighted a cigaret.

Scanning the faces about him, he saw no sign of sympathy, no possible aid among the privates. His horse was too far for an attempt at escape. His chief hope must rest on the young Arab guide who had vanished at the first hint of riot. Far from slackening the discipline of the men, the mutiny had brought orderliness. These were not men suddenly plunged into unexpected freedom of action, but rather were they reaping the result of a stroke long planned. Sentries were posted, fires were lighted. The privates split into groups, talked, smoked quietly. Belval's dinner was brought to him by the cook's assistant, and he ate.

"I rather think you should bank those fires," he suggested to Bergeret.

"If the Arabs come that'll save us half the trip."

"Thickhead! They'd attack without warning, as they always do. And it would be too late to explain the situation after a few throats were slit."

Bergeret uttered a brief order over his shoulder. Men rose immediately to obey him. The fires were extinguished.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

"I can't say I am. Listen, Bergeret, you're trying one of those stunts that seem feasible yet never succeed. No great harm has been done thus far, and no one would need be punished severely."

"Don't you know me better than that?"

The lieutenant choked with powerless rage. His initial softness of heart had caused all this; he had proved putty in Bergeret's hands. He spoke with an effort.

"Suppose you give me my horse and let me try to get back alone. Even send back the sergeants. You have no interest in taking us along as prisoners."

"Bright idea!" Bergeret agreed. "Save for one thing—you have become an article of trade. Bringing you in makes us solid with the Arabs, see? Otherwise we'd get no consideration, just be plain deserters. Maybe we can trade you for transportation to the coast."

"And from there, where can you boys go?"

"Easy. South America, maybe. Any place but here."

"There's the small matter of getting on a ship not belonging to one of the Allies. Also, passage money."

"That's our problem, Belval. You'd like to know exactly, so you could have us stopped, maybe. Don't worry, South America is not the place and we don't tell our plans."

"Perhaps you'll fight for the other side," Belval suggested.

"No. Not that we'd take seriously the business of turning traitor, renegade or whatever name fools might apply to us. But we mean to be free, you understand. We'll belong to ourselves." Bergeret reddened, the bruise left by Belval's blow of the day before stood out, a bluish smudge. "Look at us—over fifty here, each one a victim. What has the motherland done for us? Irons, blows, days in a cell. Well, we're breaking away from all that."

"And if you do see the Arabs how will you make them understand your sentiments?" Belval asked sarcastically.

"Hoist a white flag. They have a European with them."

Belval turned away, shook out his blankets, settled himself for the night. He closed his eyes and pretended to sleep. The soft hum of conversation continued; the men were prattling like children with mysterious allusions to a far distant country in which they would find refuge. By process of elimination, catching a phrase here and a word there, Belval came to the conclusion that the fifty privates planned to reach the seacoast of Tripolitania, to make their way, ultimately, to the Dutch East Indies. A fantastic scheme, but no more fantastic than Belval's own plight—a prisoner of his own men!

The talking died out. Belval heard Gallet rise. But another man took his place, bayonet gleaming faintly in the starlight.

THE DETACHMENT came to a halt in the center of a shallow depression in the plain, a sort of giant, sanded pan, rimmed by low, straggling rock ridges. The overhead sun marked noon and the fifth hour of marching that day. A half dozen white clad horsemen, Arabs, were in sight.

One of the privates ran forward, waving the improvised flag of truce, a square of white cloth at the end of a pole. Ahead, the strangers appeared to hesitate. Then, one brought up his carbine, fired in the direction of the French. The others imitated him.

"Drop down, all of you!" Bergeret shouted. "These lads don't understand. Hold your fire."

He gave the example of caution. The

lieutenant remained standing between his kneeling guards. He lighted a cigaret, smoking nervously.

"Maybe they'll cheat you out of your trade, Bergeret, the joke would be on you."

"Their guns are flashing— They're reloading— Watch out!" Bergeret, crouched on the ground, agitated the pole and its white rag of surrender aloft to attract attention.

The riders, undoubtedly scouts of the raiding band reported to Captain Lagnac, grouped, appeared to hold a consultation.

"See, they're wondering why we don't shoot back," Bergeret announced triumphantly. "They won't shoot again until their chief is here. That's easy to tell."

Leaving one rider on observation, the others vanished behind a jutting rise of rocks. The single watcher remained silhouetted against the intense blue of the sky, in the drenching sunlight.

"They're surrounding us," Belval protested. "They'll do that before talking."

"What do we care? We're not going to fight." Bergeret addressed the men guarding the lieutenant. "Watch him. He's getting ready to do something foolish."

"Be good, now—be good," one of the privates urged, grasping Belval's sleeve. "All will be settled in a few minutes. Hell, Lieutenant, don't feel so bad about it! There's been a million guys taken prisoner since the war started. They can't blame you; you couldn't lick fifty of us."

Belval had never particularly noticed the speaker before. A slouchy, unprepossessing fellow. Yet he was grateful for even this poor sympathy, felt less alone. Being taken after combat would have been evil luck, but being sold out by his men stabbed him with humiliation and disgust. After all, they were Frenchmen, and their shame fell on the entire nation. He hated Bergeret with an intensity of feeling he had scarcely suspected in himself. The rest were guiltless, poor fellows with retarded intelligence, the toys of a single mind. Bergeret, it was, who had coaxed them into rebellion, who had warped their finer sentiments.

"Here they come," Bergeret cried.

More than a score of horsemen appeared, joined the man left on guard. Bergeret brought out the field-glasses taken from the lieutenant.

"There's a guy there with riding boots on," he declared. "We're all right, fellows—they have a European with them."

The privates relaxed, stood up, leaning on their rifles. In spite of Bergeret's assurance, Belval could discern that they had dreaded to meet an irreconcilable foe; discerned also that he had failed to sense their passing doubt, failed to make use of it.

"They're coming near with a flag of truce, too," Bergeret resumed. "The fellow with the boots and another who totes the flag."

The two horsemen halted five hundred yards away, between the Arabs on the slope to the south and the detachment. The flagbearer remained in the saddle; the other dismounted, waved his hand, motioning that he desired the French to meet him between the lines.

"Take charge, Gallet," Bergeret ordered. "Keep an eye on Belval."

He handed the white flag to another man and went forward slowly, conscious of his new dignity. Belval saw him approach the stranger, offer his hand. He noted with satisfaction that the other man did not accept this mark of friendship. An animated dialogue followed, Bergeret gesturing, evidently arguing. Finally the Inco returned at the double.

"What's wrong?" Gallet asked anxiously.

"The dog won't talk to me. Wants to deal with the officer in command."

"The devil!" Gallet's face fell. "Did you explain?"

"As much as he'd let me. He says he's in command and won't speak to anybody but our commander. They may have us surrounded—we can't argue too much. The main thing is to get taken prisoner."

"Wouldn't think it was as hard as that

to give up," Gallet muttered. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Humor the swine."

"How?"

"Take Belval to him."

"You're sure he understood you? You told him you had taken charge, that you were our chief?" Gallet insisted.

"Understood me? He speaks better French than you do. Said he had seen an officer standing among us, and that the officer was the only one with authority to speak." Bergeret turned to Belval. "So, you've got to come with me."

"I refuse to have anything to do with this conference," Belval stated. "I have no desire to surrender."

"That's what I told him," Bergeret insisted.

"All right. We'll stay here and wait."

"You're a stubborn fool," Bergeret resumed. "I know it's no use trying to beat around the bush with your kind. You'll be killed before giving in. I'll tell you this, though: If you don't come with me to speak with that pig inside of two minutes, I'll have Dubois shot; and the other non-coms, one after another. Here's your watch, the same you held on me, and here's your revolver—" Bergeret produced the weapon which he had concealed within his tunic. "As sure as you knocked me down, I'll shoot Dubois—and through the bean, too."

Dubois was pushed forward to face the menacing muzzle. He did not blink.

"Let him shoot, Lieutenant. All of us non-coms are willing to take it. We're with you." Nevertheless the words were not uttered without inner struggle, for sweat slowly trickled down the red face.

"Forty-five seconds more—" Bergeret reminded. His face was tensed, his lead cheeks trembled. There was enough nerve strain in the man to drive him to press the trigger.

"All right," Belval accepted. "I'll talk to him."

"Thanks, Lieutenant," Dubois said.

BERGERET picked up the white flag and preceded Belval.

The commander of the Arabs came forward to greet the Frenchman. He wore a white uniform, shining boots, but the rest of his attire—white cloak lined with blue, turban—was native. The face beneath the folds of cloth was ludicrous in contrast, fleshy, round brick red. A sparse, light chestnut beard sprouted from the heavy chin. His eyes were blue and friendly.

"You seem to be in some sort of a mess, Lieutenant," he addressed Belval. His French was very good, with just a trace of harsh German accent.

"I am," Belval felt the blood rush to his face.

"Captain Probst," the German introduced himself, "detached to Tripolitania."

"Lieutenant Belval. Sixth African Battalion, as you may ascertain from the papers which will no doubt be turned over to you by these men."

"African Battalion?" Probst nodded. "That explains it. I was somewhat surprised, for, as a rule, your troops in this region are efficient." The German officer glanced toward Bergeret. "It is a pity to have to command such *canaille*. I see you've been on the European front."

"I have, Captain."

"A good fortune which did not befall me," Probst explained, offering Belval a cigaret. "You see, I came to Tripolitania in 1911, with an ambulance from Germany. On the Turkish side, naturally."

"You have since become a combatant, I see."

"The outbreak of hostilities found me here. There was little chance of my succeeding in getting to Germany. I was ordered by my consul to make myself useful— But we'll have plenty of time to talk later. We must get the details of your surrender straightened out."

"Being a prisoner of my own men," Belval declared, "I can not decide anything. It is up to you to accept or reject their proposition as you see fit."

"You are acquainted with their desires, of course?"

"Vaguely. They did not inform me of the actual terms they expected to obtain from you."

"They wish to lay down their arms, penetrate our lines and be given some occupation to earn their keep while waiting a chance to travel on. My strict duty is to accept their proposition—to avoid losses among my own men. Privately, I would have preferred something cleaner, cleaner than a parley with a gathering of scoundrels. I wish I could do something for you. I put myself in your place, Lieutenant. You are a gentleman of my own class"—Probst looked toward Bergeret meaningly—"and you have my deepest sympathy."

"You might accept the surrender of the privates and leave me and my non-coms to make the best of our ill luck, arms in hand." Belval advanced this as a weak effort at jesting in the face of adversity, but the German considered the proposition seriously.

"How many are loyal?"

"A half-dozen."

"Suicide. For I might as well tell you I have five hundred men surrounding you. And my men are true warriors. You and your non-coms shall be treated as is customary for men of your ranks. The authorities will probably back my promise to these others. Even as prisoners, such men are not good to have about long."

"It is agreed, then," Bergeret broke in abruptly, "that we lay down our arms and are fed until we can get out of the country?"

"I said I accepted your terms. That should be enough for you. Shut up!" Probst turned to Belval, adding, "Count upon me to present facts as they occurred, when the time comes to free you of all ignominy. You can not be blamed for being in command of such scum." He beckoned to the man with the white flag, a native wearing a red fez and a muddy khaki uniform. "This man will go with you, Lieutenant, and see that the men are unarmed as they come to our lines one by one. He speaks a little French, which will facilitate matters. Or, if you prefer, you may remain here with me. The actual ceremony might prove painful to behold."

Belval hesitated. In spite of Probst's voiced understanding, there was a definite ring of scorn in his tone, a pompous pity. Mute sympathy, a rigid adherence to the usual code of surrender would have proved preferable. Yes, the German was right—the actual surrender would not be a pleasing sight, Frenchmen laying down their rifles without fighting.

"Better come back, Lieutenant," Bergeret spoke up.

The title, pronounced with deliberate intention, cracked out like a whip lash. Belval glanced at Bergeret curiously, believed he caught a wink.

"Hurry," Probst urged. "I wish to get it over with."

"I'll go back," Belval said impulsively. "My place is at my post until actually relieved by superior order or the fortunes of war."

"Right!" Probst snapped. He smiled in subtle amusement. "And in case your men have a change of heart—for I rather expect that is what you intend to attempt to accomplish—merely send my man back with the news!"

"Thank you, Captain," Belval said shortly.

HE SALUTED, spun on his heel, strode away, raging inwardly. Probst had good reason to smile. Belval raged all the more because he sensed in the German a man of lesser ability, making the most under a gloss of politeness, of an opportunity to gloat over another. Moreover, a man who lied without need, for Belval knew there were not five hundred Arabs in his band. With all the cards in his favor, Probst could still enjoy the luxury of a bluff. Belval wiped his cheeks with the back of his hand.

"I'll fix you for this some day, Bergeret. Can't you see, the man was laughing! God, I'll never forget it!"

Bergeret glanced at him, shouldered the flag and broke into a run, followed by Belval and the Arab. The men gathered

around to hear the result of the conference.

"What's up?" Gallet inquired. "All fixed?"

Bergeret moistened his lips.

"It's all off, boys. Their conditions are too hard."

"What do you mean?"

"We have to surrender without terms. We'd be held as prisoners of war in Tripolitania until the end of the war, then turned back to the French as stipulated in the treaties." Bergeret went on to invent a half dozen clauses, each more convincing than the preceding one, displaying superb imagination. "Yes, it seems that's one of the laws of war, comrades! Prisoners must be sent back to their own country. You can't go against it. Then our score would soon be settled. In the meanwhile, we'd be put to work building roads for them—all work, for perhaps a year or so, then the firing squad for us. Nothing in it for our bunch, eh?"

"So we're cooked anyway," Gallet said skeptically.

"No. The lieutenant agrees not to push charges against those who go back. And there's only a couple of hundred of the swine, if that much, while we're over fifty. They can't buy our hides that cheap. We've licked them before, or guys like them."

"We and a few more," Gallet resumed. "Yes. Is that a promise, Lieutenant—what Bergeret tells us you'll do?"

"Word of honor."

"Even Bergeret will be all right?"

"Surest thing."

"What the hell is *he* doing here?" the tenor went on, pointing at the man with the fez.

"Came to see you give up your guns."

Thereupon several men stepped forward, and the Arab might have been made to pay for the abrupt end of their wild dreams had not Belval interfered.

"Leave him alone!" He addressed the Arab. "Go and tell your chief we've decided to fight. Convey to him, also, my deepest gratitude for his courtesy."

While the man was trotting back toward Probst, the Disciplinary Company took open order, packages of cartridges were broken open, the blue wrappers fluttering about on the yellow sand. There was a tenseness in the men's faces, a glint in their eyes, that boded no good for those they were to fight.

"We could start now, Lieutenant," Bergeret suggested, "and break through when they don't expect it."

Belval shook his head.

"No, the captain behaved honorably. The least we can do is to imitate him. Say, Bergeret, what happened to make you change your mind?"

"I don't quite know, Lieutenant." Bergeret's forehead was barred by a puzzled frown. "Maybe, the way he spoke about us in the *Bat' d' Af'*. He sort of believes we're afraid of him and his brown bellies. Maybe it was the sight of you, sick to your stomach because you had to give in to him."

"Sort of recalled what country you came from, eh?"

"No." Bergeret shook his head. "Just saw that he was no better than our officers—that it would be the same everywhere. If anybody thinks us scum, it'll be in our own language!"

THE ARAB had reached Probst, was talking excitedly. The German captain glanced in the direction of the detachment. Belval deliberately picked up the flag of truce, tore the white cloth from the staff, rolled it into a ball and tossed it away.

"He's got our message," Belval said jubilantly. "You can see from here that he isn't pleased! Say, how do you square the lies you told your comrades with that free man's conscience of yours?"

"We'll need to fight like hell to get out of here, and they'll think it's their only chance."

Dubois came near, rifle in hand, still uncertain as to how he happened to be free and armed. He grinned cheerfully.

"Sergeant-Major, you'll face east with twenty men," Belval pointed out knots of white garbed warriors. "The range is

about eight hundred meters. Set the sights. Watch out for the signal to open fire. By the way, if anything happens to me and the command falls on you, Dubois, I have given up the idea of going to the redoubt. It looks as if, by the time we get out of here, there won't be enough of us left to do much. Fall back upon Sidi-Okba. In the meantime, keep them steady—steady—"

"All right, Lieutenant."

Scattered shot, the hum of bullets passing high—and the truce was ended. Belval sank to one knee behind the long line of prone soldiers, a line breaking at right angles on his left to face a threatened turning movement.

"Shorten sights!" he ordered. "Fire at will!"

The first volley of the Lebels crackled. Impalpable blue smoke vanished in the glowing haze trembling above. Immediately ahead, skirmishing Arabs were approaching, dodging behind the meager cover afforded by boulders. A group of them broke into a run, rifles brandished, short *jellabas* whipping in the wind. Two or three fell, the rest plunged behind rocks.

"That's the stuff!" Bergeret shouted happily.

"Machine gunners," Belval said, shaking his head.

The ripping, hammering reports of an automatic weapon soon proved him right. The first gusts passed overhead, the next tore into the sand fifty yards short, kicking up little spouts of dirt which screened the view for a moment. A hundred and fifty yards to the left of the first, another machine gun opened fire. Whether due to the inexpert handling of the native gunners or the deficiency of the weapon, no great harm was done.

Bergeret crawled to the lieutenant's side.

"If they get the range, we're cooked. Pretty rotten shots, but very soon they can't help hitting us."

"Captain Probst is trying to scare us into surrendering," Belval pointed out. "Thinks it'll be easy after what happened among us. He's played a fool trick, sent those machine guns without proper rifle supports. We should rush them, but what can I do with you fellows?"

"Anything, Lieutenant—once they've decided to stick."

"Could they be trusted not to lose their heads?"

Bergeret smiled.

"I'll see to that personally, if you'll give me command of the rush."

"All right, take two squads—one to each gun."

THE PRIVATE crawled away as swiftly as he had come, passed from man to man. Belval noted that he selected carefully, at times skipping several privates near him to touch one further away. At length, he reached the end of the line, came back toward the center.

In the meantime the two machine guns fired in short, coughing jerks, like short licks of live lead tongues seeking persistently for the riflemen flat against the sand, ready to let loose at maximum speed. The bulk of the Arabs, concealed further away, bided their time, kept up a desultory fire with their carbines.

"Ready, Lieutenant. It'll be easy. Those fools came too far forward with their coffee grinders." The men selected were fixing bayonets. Bergeret added proudly, "Two grenades apiece, Lieutenant. They were with the baggage thrown away by the mule drivers. I had them distributed this morning."

"Do they know how to use them?"

"Our fellows?" Bergeret laughed. "Say, Lieutenant, we were at Sidi-Okba during the siege!"

Bergeret was on his feet. He leaped forward, half turned to face the French line, rifle held high in a theatrical gesture, teeth gleaming in his bronzed face.

"*En avant, les Incos!*" he screamed.

Sixteen men, the value of two squads, rose, surged forward. Ahead of the second group, the long legged Gallet cut down the yards in gigantic strides. They

had dash, superb verve in attack, these privates of the *Bat' d' Af'*, the dregs of the army and the shame of France.

They advanced singly, yards separating each man from his companions on either side. Once more, the ever present influence of Bergeret's controlling mind was evidenced. He had not spoken a dozen words, yet all had understood fully, performed as if following a rehearsal. Two or three were cut down, slumped to heaps of white on the yellow earth. The rest went on, unshaken, and soon the back fling of the hands, the wide gesture so similar to the noble sweep of the sower, warned that the grenades were being brought into play.

"*En avant!*" Belval cried in his turn, "*En avant les Incos!*"

The whole line bounded after him, the privates fixing bayonets as they ran. The lieutenant had seen the retreat of the machine gunners, the swift approach of the supporting riflemen of Probst's band. The time had arrived to risk the issue on one move. He leaped over one of the fallen, tripped as a groping hand clutched at his ankle. He had a flashing vision of Gallet's face, twisted, mouth wide open, eyes unseeing.

He was conscious of a whirl of figures, heard grunts, shouts; reports crashed near his ears. He emptied his revolver, grappled with the nearest man. Through the din he distinguished regular volleys. Then he was standing in the open, watching the last of the fleeing Arabs vanish into a shallow gully fringed by leafless bushes.

"Down, Lieutenant," Dubois advised.

Belval threw himself flat on the ground. The unexpected onrush, it was obvious, had disrupted the plans of Probst. The flankers, far from their European leader, had failed to perceive the correct move, had been eager only to save the machine guns in which they placed a childish trust. A score of steady riflemen armed with magazine rifles had proved a serious obstacle to this attempt.

"We have a damned good chance to get our hides out of it," Dubois said. "Don't you think so, Lieutenant?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Bergeret?" Dubois went on enthusiastically. "He gathered the second section to salt the other bunch coming up from the left. One of the machine guns is bursted altogether by a grenade, and we've got the other. That fellow," Dubois paused impressively, "that fellow ought to be a sergeant!"

"BERGERET?"

"You mean the Inco, Lieutenant?" The hospital orderly indicated with his hand. "Bed Seventeen—near the third window."

Belval tiptoed between the rows of cots, halted before Bed Seventeen. Bergeret lay still, one hand outspread limply on the blanket, eyes closed. The orderly touched his shoulder.

"Don't need to pretend you're asleep; it's not for a dressing. It's your lieutenant come to see you."

"Belval?" Bergeret opened his eyes, turned his head on the pillow, seeking his visitor. Fatigue and loss of blood had paled his face. He appeared almost childish with his thin cheeks and burning eyes beneath the sprouting blond hair. The lieutenant sat on a stool near the head of the bed, grasped the wounded man's hand.

"You'll pull through, Bergeret, the doctors say. Six weeks and you'll be on your feet."

"Pretty good. Say, none of these birds here seem to know anything. Last I can remember, we had caught the machine guns—"

"A bit of luck. The fight changed and went against us from then on. Probst was not a fool, realized that his mistake had been caused mostly by the small esteem he had for you men."

"Guess he learned something."

"When he saw you were sticking he showed what he really could do—surrounded us, sent his men on in a series of short rushes. You were hit just before that. By nightfall there were twenty-two dead and ten wounded. No water.

We tried to get away several times, but they were mounted and kept ahead of us. I knew that as soon as it was really dark they'd rush us with the steel, ten to one"

"Nobody asked to surrender, did they?"

"Not one man. Things looked pretty blue. Then the Arabs let us alone. Didn't know why until I heard the firing in the rear. It was the Tidikelt Company of the Camel-Corps, returning to Sidi-Okba after a jaunt into the far south started two months before. Nobody expected them. They escorted us back here, three days ago. I explained matters to Captain Lagnac. No one will be punished. He considers that you redeemed yourselves."

Belval brought a paper package from his inside pocket.

"I recommended you for the rank of sergeant. You proved you could carry off the job. Your promotion was granted this morning by wire. Here are your stripes." Belval tore the package open, placed the two broad bands of silvery braid in Bergeret's hand. "Corporal was not enough, you know. The leap had to be wider to get you out. You have rehabilitated yourself, Sergeant, and you may ask to serve in whatever unit you desire, until demobilized at the end of hostilities. Which will you enter—Legion, Zouaves, *Tirailleurs* or Line Infantry?"

"I'd rather stay in the *Bat' d' Af'!*"

"As you wish," Belval accepted, concealing his surprise. "I merely believed you wouldn't wish to boss your former mates."

"Oh, that part's all right," Bergeret smiled confidently. "I know how to handle them. Thank you very much, Lieutenant."

Belval rose to go, shook hands. He was in the anteroom leading to the stairs when he heard Bergeret's voice again.

"Orderly—orderly!"

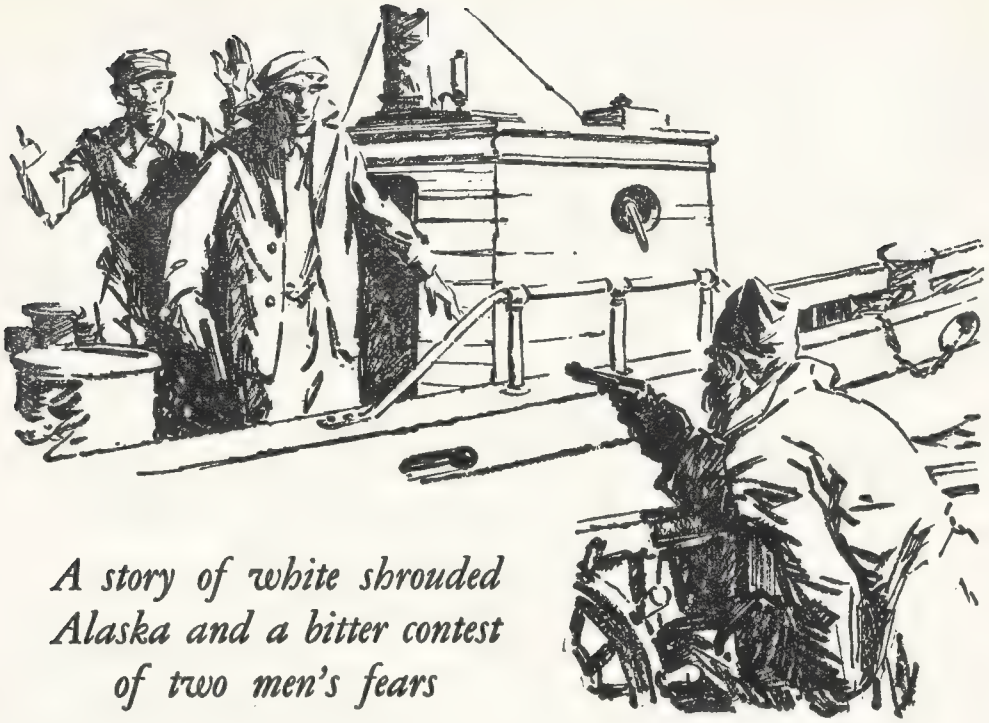
Belval was on the stairs when the hoarse shouting halted him.

"Listen, pig's face," Bergeret clamored, "you've lorded it over me long enough. See these? You know what they are? Stripes! From now on I get non-coms' rations, in everything including wine."

"All right," replied the lazy voice of the orderly, "all right."

"Would it scorch your tongue to say 'Sergeant'?" Bergeret challenged.

Belval went down the stairs laughing. Others beside him must have been amused, for he distinguished a low, moaning laughter fusing from the cots of the wounded.



A story of white shrouded Alaska and a bitter contest of two men's fears

LEAD ~ NO GRIT

By DEX VOLNEY

THIS is a yarn about a pair of cowards. Black Alf Vladonik was the greater coward of the two, because, being a Russian, he was more highstrung and imaginative than Bob Aunam. Bob Aunam was big and quiet—and believed to possess iron nerve. Nobody in Alaska would believe otherwise—at least not in the Shumagin Islands, where Aunam is United States marshal and is loved by his wife who used to have hair that shone in the sun like fine gold.

Bob Aunam's reputation was permanently made with the downing of Vladonik, one of Alaska's most notorious badmen; but even before that he had gained a name for nerve by shooting Portugee Joe point blank at ten feet when that black bearded miner ran amuck and tore down the main street of Unga with a six-shooter blazing in each fist. Bob Aunam simply stepped out from around the corner of Soapy Komedal's barroom with his gun in his hand and shot the Portuguese dead on the spot. He just acted on instinct in the face of danger, fired with lucky effectiveness, and then stood looking ahead dazedly while men shook his hand and congratulated him on his quiet poise. He didn't tell them that he had shut his eyes before he pulled the trigger of his weapon.

One evening, several weeks after that episode, there burst on the quiet air the daily five-fifteen roar of exploding coyote holes full of dynamite in the open stringers of the Apollo Mine. Then vermilion clayed miners came streaming down the mountainside to the rambling town of Unga, which nestled in a colorful splotch of white painted walls and red shingled roofs, on the rocky shore of Unga Island.

A couple of men somewhat in advance of the other miners started with surprise as they walked down the one rambling street, which ended in a stretch of ocean pounded shingle, and saw a stranger leaning calmly against one of the porch posts of the little white building that served as the marshal's office.

"There's Black Alf Vladonik home again!" exclaimed Joe Lyons, drill foreman, peering at the distant figure. "Ted McCallum, our old marshal, run him out of these islands four years ago at the end of a gun. Said he'd shoot him on sight if he ever come back. Guess he's heard that McCallum's gone out to th' States, an' so he's come home. Well, this town's bad, but she's extry bad when Vladonik's here. A gold shipment goes out tonight, too. I wonder . . ."

THE NEWS of Vladonik's homecoming swiftly spread. Black Alf stood about six-three in his otterskin muckluks, and he was a spectacular and powerful figure—if you weren't too experienced in Alaskan badmen of his day. He wore an Aleut made mackinaw coat of red fox, while the soft boots on his feet were the finest products of Indian skill, sparkling with colored beads sewn in fantastic Aleutian patterns. From the cartridge studded belt about his blue shirted waist depended two gorgeously embossed holsters which carried a pair of magnificent silver and pearl handled guns of heavy caliber.

Swagger type he was—strikingly picturesque, bold looking, and bad, presumably, though badmen, however bad, are but relatively so. Badmen, lightning gun pullers and dead shots almost invariably go down before some one a little worse and a little quicker. On the whole, Black Alf was handsome, in a dark florid way. He looked like a half piratical swashbuckler; but, as old Long Gun Hooser, allegedly the owner of the longest barreled weapon in Alaska, used to say—

"If you got four aces y'self, you can call any man's bluff."

Today the town of Unga is a scene of strange and appalling desolation. The houses are dilapidated, with roofs falling in, and inhabited by a few moonshine soaked squaw men. The gold mines of the island are abandoned. The gold has all been worked out; the weather blackened stamp mills and sheds are but desolate ruins. Only the everlasting mountains stand unaltered, robed in virgin white, ranged about the deserted bay.

But when Black Alf Vladonik came home that August evening he had a good audience; for the gold boom was at its height, and there were a thousand gold mad men in the mushroom town. Also, a thin sprinkling of women of more than one kind.

THE STREET had begun to fill rapidly. The day crews of the feverishly working mines poured down the slopes. Women and children were running late errands to the Alaska Commercial Company's store. There was a cheerful bustle.

A few feet from Vladonik, a big yellow cat came along the railing of the porch in front of the marshal's office, which was closed. Politely she set herself down in the slanting rays of the late sun and began an evidently much neglected toilet, licking her paws carefully with a brilliant scarlet tongue.

Almost at once, from the adjacent trading store, there came an excited yapping. Then an eager little black dog shot like an arrow out of the door and rushed straight at the cat.

Old enemies, these, without doubt, for the yellow one jumped swiftly on to Vladonik's broad shoulders, clawed her way, spitting and scratching, up the back of his neck, and leaped for the roof of the porch. At the same instant, the frantic little dog scrambled between the legs of the plunging man, upsetting him so that he sat down heavily in the muddy street. The cat, missing the roof, fell to the ground and scampered off, a bushy tailed yellow streak. The dog scampered after her, sounding off sharply, his plumy tail debonairly upright.

The occupants of the street stared snickeringly at the big dark faced man sitting in the mud with his black fur cap down over his eyes. His lips had gone white under his heavy tan; his mouth started open with the expression of one about to cry out from sudden fear.

Somewhere a loud guffaw rang out in the still air. Black Alf's features flushed angrily, then hardened swiftly into the harsh lines of fiendish rage. He sprang to his feet, with a lithe movement of his muscles. His right hand flashed downward and came up—swift, certain—blazing death. There was a helter skelter rush of leaping figures in the street. Within a second it was incredibly empty and lifeless.

Poor happy go lucky little Black. The first heavy bullet ripped his diminutive body from end to end, knocked him down; and four others ripped him through and through, smashed him to a bleeding and motionless pulp, as he lay a singularly pitiful blot in the dark mud of the street.

OF A SUDDEN, Pete Wickman, the keeper of the Commercial Company's store, appeared in the doorway and peered out with pinkish eyes, half blinded by the bright glare outside, at the huddled little body in the mud. When he turned and glared at the powerfully built man in front of the marshal's office, his puckery red face was working with honest rage.

Vladonik wheeled sharply to face Wickman, forty feet away. The long blue barrel of the .45 in his hand snapped swiftly into a dead level position. It stopped there, menacingly, without a perceptible quiver.

"Got something to say, mister?" asked the killer.

There was an ugly grin on his face, and his eyes were sinister.

Pete Wickman looked into the rigid mouth of the gun. His clenched hands twitched. Spectators, again emerging silently into the street, watched, engrossed. Then—

"Not now, stranger," said Wickman. He turned slowly back into the trading store.

Black Alf holstered his gun, giving way to a harsh laugh, which suddenly stopped short.

Down the street, which was again cautiously animate, plodded a round faced and china blue eyed little old Swede in a red mackinaw and tasseled gray wolfskin cap. Cuddled tenderly against him was a white skinned girl with uncovered hair that shone with the sun on it, like fine gold.

Vladonik stared hard at the girl, his face mantling a deep red, and his dark eyes glinting with a ferocious hunger. Obeying the tigerish impulses that welled up within him, he stepped straight toward her. She halted, her cheeks going white. The old man's jaw dropped with alarm.

"Better stay where you are, mister."

The voice, low and toneless, sounded close behind Vladonik's ear. He whirled around, his hands dropping to his .45's. Then he stiffened, for he found himself facing the black muzzle of a gun. The weapon was held in the clay stained hand of a large youngish man with eyes the color of sea water on a cloudy day, and with a shapeless gray hat pressed back from his brown chestnut hair.

"What th' hell—" began Vladonik fiercely, his hands again creeping toward his guns.

"Don't shoot, Bob—please!" cried the girl, suddenly stepping forward and catching the red clayed hand of the younger man.

But she was too late, for with a sudden convulsive jerk of the left corner of his mouth, Bob Aunam pressed the trigger of his six-shooter. The gun crashed out in the evening air, aimlessly, the bullet smoking by Vladonik's body.

Black Alf's face went gray; he raised his hands straight above his head and flattened himself back against the board wall of the house behind him. His dark features were convulsed unnaturally as if he were about to shriek. With violent haste he slid around the corner of the building, out of sight of Bob Aunam's eyes, which had locked fast with frigid fear.

BLACK ALF VLADONIK mixed with the crowd along the town's single street that night and announced himself. He made a stir, for nobody had watched his encounter with Bob Aunam earlier in the evening at close enough range to understand what had really happened. And Unga, lawless as it was in those days of the late Nineties, had not forgotten his doings of five years before. His reputation was all about him, as he drank and bluffed his way through the town's smokily lighted saloons. Yet within he was full of morbid fear.

He heard of Bob Aunam that evening several times, heard how Aunam had shot down Portugee Joe without the least trouble, after the insane miner had cleared the entire street. He heard a lot about Bob Aunam's nerve, and he had already found out for himself that the town's new marshal was over quick with his six-gun. It came to him that Bob Aunam, like his predecessor, was going to be a stumbling block to his freedom in the Shumagin Islands.

As Black Alf swallowed glass upon glass of fiery liquor his brain became possessed with the idea that he would kill Bob Aunam. The fire of the whisky seemed to burn up his fears; he felt himself a killer, ruthless, terrible, full of his own strength.

"I'll show 'em," he muttered.

NEAR midnight, at Soapy Komedal's barroom, many miners were sitting around in a blue haze of tobacco smoke, their voices droning under the click of chips, when Black Alf Vladonik strode in. Almost instantly, upon his entrance, everybody in the place stiffened to attention, sensing impending trouble.

Black Alf swaggered to the bar. Behind this massive embankment of hardwood was a bottle and mirror studded buffet, and two immense silver armored cash registers. Between the glittering cliff and the polished mahogany dike in front of it, Soapy Komedal, sleek and plutocratic looking, reigned from the vantage of a raised runway that put him head and shoulders above the men who leaned on elbows before him, resembling devout heathens worshipping before a complacently smiling fat idol. But, with one look at Vladonik, faces grew rigid, and men moved silently away.

Vladonik called roughly for whisky, slapped a gold twenty on the bar, so that it clinked loudly, and tossed off two stiff drinks without moving an eyelash. Then he turned and leaned back against the polished rail, with his thumbs hooked in his silver ornamented belt. The heavy six-guns on his hips gleamed dully under his red fox fur coat, which was thrown open carelessly.

He inspected the occupants of the room with a nasty half smile on his face. The light glinted in his dark eyes as if reflected from the facets of jet black gems.

The tense silence was interrupted only by the drunken mumbling of Magpie Hansen, the skipper of the codfish schooner *Maweema*. He was complaining, in a high pitched, chattering voice, about the long wait he was having to make for the arrival of the hundred thousand dollar gold shipment from the Apollo Mine which he was to take out to San Francisco with him. At length, irritated by the stillness of the barroom, which he could not understand, he arose and lurched out of the door into the darkness of the street.

Black Alf Vladonik's eyes followed after him intently, then turned back to the men in the saloon. They shifted restlessly under his hard look. Soapy Komedal polished glasses and moved with a sign toward that part of his bar within which was built invisibly a good thick sheet of steel boiler plate.

IT WAS then that they heard the sound of feet at the door. The slow *clump-clump-clump* of miner's boots broke the strained silence. There was Bob Aunam coming in. He saw Vladonik, paused in his steps for an infinitesimal moment, then came walking heavily across the floor.

Vladonik's blazing black eyes fastened upon the newcomer. He swung his pow-

erful body halfway around, to face Aunam.

Men glanced at one another questioningly, with suppressed excitement in their eyes. When Soapy Komedal spoke, his voice seemed unusually loud and empty in the stillness of the big room.

"What'll it be, Bob?" he queried uneasily.

"Same old grizzly stopper, Soapy," replied the marshal.

At the sound of Bob Aunam's toneless voice Black Alf wheeled about with the quickness of a lynx and faced him.

"They tell me around this camp that you are a man with iron nerve," he said loudly.

There was a sound of mockery in his tone.

"I ain't makin' any claims about that," replied Aunam.

His fingers moved toward the glass of liquor set up for him on the bar, then stopped uncertainly. There was a slight quiver at the left corner of his mouth.

Black Alf's eyebrows lifted. He stood quite still for an instant; then the hot glare flashed up again in his black orbs.

"Sweet modesty talk!" he snarled. "Because you're th' marshal an' got th' law behind you, you can do a lot of shooting. S'pose you figure to keep this town in a regular straightjacket, eh?"

"I didn't ask for th' job of marshal. It was wished on to me. Maybe you'd like to take my place—"

A harsh snicker arose in the silent barroom. It must have come from old Long Gun Hooser, because he remarked afterward to Joe Lyons that Aunam's style of passing the buck was just too good. Nobody was near enough to the bar to see that Aunam's face was rigid, his eyes blue and icy, his skin clammy with cold sweat. Soapy Komedal could have seen, but he was bent double behind his sheet of boiler plate, breathing audibly.

At Bob Aunam's fancied gibe, Black Alf's face turned a deep terrible red. His eyes became unsteady. Hot murder leered out of them. He shook in the grip of hate, like a strong tree in a wind, a veritable mask of passion, violent and pitiable.

BOB AUNAM, seen from a distance, as he stood there in the gloomy light of the big smoky oil lamp suspended from the ceiling of the room, looked unimpressed. He was as motionless as stone, gone gray, speechless, gripping the edge of the bar with fierce desperation. Suddenly a grinning simper overspread his large face—insane, silly, insulting.

With a choking snarl, Black Alf dropped his hands in a lightninglike swoop for his guns.

Bob Aunam made a single movement. It was invisibly swift, fear driven, the automatic action of his subconscious self, acting in sheer self preservation. As Vladonik's descending hands closed over the silver ornamented butts of his guns, Vladonik saw the nose of the other man's .45 coming up like the head of a darting snake. He realized instantly that he was too late with his own weapons. His face contorted horribly; his mouth flew open in a frozen effort to cry out.

Bob Aunam's gun came on up. With a convulsive jerk of his lip muscles at the left side of his face, he pulled the trigger. A long streak of hot flame blazed out with a deafening roar in the barroom. There was a jingling crash; the big smoking lamp overhead swayed, with a rattling sound and a tinkle of shattered glass falling on the floor, and flickered out.

Overturning chairs struck the floor of the saloon with loud thumps. Two guns blazed futilely in the pitch darkness. Men cursed hoarsely as they plunged for the doorway and out into the street. Within five minutes the place was empty, silent as a tomb. Soapy Komedal lighted another lamp and peered about. An expression of puzzled relief overspread his sandy features when he failed to discover a single dead body on the floor, or even a drop of blood.

VLADONIK stared about him in the darkness of the street. Twice, now, he had barely escaped death at the hands of Bob Aunam. It seemed to him that the other man had deliberately let him off these two times—had had the drop on him

and had coolly shot wild. It was not conceivable to Vladonik that a man so fast on the trigger as Aunam could have been shooting badly, except on purpose.

The thought came to Vladonik in a flash that Aunam knew him for a coward. Aunam hadn't even cared to kill him—yet. Black Alf found that humiliating thought. He cursed with bitter obscenity. He was a coward; he knew it. He had gotten away with a good many killings; but every time, after emerging from an affray, he had been obliged to get by himself and lie down with his heart pounding in violent jumps, his back turned cold, his hair bristling, and sweat starting from his pores.

This Aunam was the most dangerous man he had ever come against. Another clash with him would mean death. Black Alf decided that he had better leave again, and at once. But there was something he could do first that would net him a big poke of gold, something that would leave him enthroned forever in the memories of the inhabitants of Unga Island as the king of killers. Something that would be like a finger to the nose to Aunam, too.

Vladonik was watching the gleams of lanterns moving about the rocky shingle, where the incoming surf boomed drowsily. He saw the legs of Aleut natives in the lantern light, and two heavy leathern boxes of gold from the Apollo Mine, marked, strapped and sealed, ready to go abroad the schooner *Maweema*, lying over at Squaw Harbor, around on the sheltered side of the island.

He heard the chattering whine of Magpie Hansen, the skipper, as Hansen put off to a big gasoline tug, the *Empress*, which had come into the cove. The entire outfit was soon making out of the bay in the velvety blackness of the night, with glowing red and green running lights marking the position of the departing boat.

"Lord!" exclaimed Vladonik, hoarsely. "I'll fool 'em all—and then clear out!"

He ran down on to the shingle and put off in a punt to his own small black power boat.

IN THE gray glow of the approaching dawn, Black Alf Vladonik headed his throbbing boat in behind Cross Rock, taking a short cut that would intercept the *Empress* two or three miles from her destination. The increasing brightness of the morning unveiled the islands of the Shumagin archipelago, and a barrier of saw toothed reefs loomed black and sinister outside of Vladonik's boat, a swirl in white clouds of foam.

Far outside, the *Empress* was circling around these reefs, covering many extra miles. The heavy swell of the Pacific roared ceaselessly in the sea caves worn into the cliffs of the island.

As the aurora of the Alaskan summer sun redly tinged the sky to the eastward at three in the morning, Black Alf lay waiting behind the jagged loom of the highest part of the barrier, known as the Pinnacle, near the entrance of Squaw Harbor, where the waiting codfish schooner lay at anchor. The *Empress* was a black speck to seaward, steadily growing larger as she hauled back in toward the island.

In the heavy undertow, Black Alf was unable to anchor his craft, and instead, he was obliged to heave to under a slowly turning engine. A sudden surge of the sea whirled his boat like a bit of flotsam toward the Pinnacle, and a crashing shock ensued, throwing him off his feet. With a curse, he reversed his engine and backed out from behind the rocks. In a few moments he saw that he had several shattered planks. His boat was leaking dangerously.

The *Empress* was now close upon him, coming steadily forward, with a white ripple about her bluff bows, and two or three faces peering over her green rail. Vladonik threw himself on his face in the after part of the cockpit, feigning injury. His guns were in his hands underneath him, in readiness.

With a hissing sigh of cleaving water, the tug swept alongside. There came a throaty hail from one of the two Aleut boatmen who were aboard with Magpie Hansen. Black Alf, in response to the cry of the native, raised himself slightly

to give his two guns free play; then upon the three unprotected bodies, anxiously leaning toward him in the other boat, he released two hot roaring streams of lead.

"Ayah! God!" shrieked one of the Aleuts, a slender brown skinned lad; with a whirling movement the youth spun about and dropped in a heap.

The other Aleut leaped to the cabin of the boat and snatched up a Winchester rifle. He thrust the barrel through a porthole, leveling the gun at Vladonik.

But Black Alf's lithe body was hurtling through the air, in a leap toward the *Empress*. As he landed on the deck of the tug, Hansen sank at his feet, gushing blood from three bullet holes. Black Alf's smoking guns turned into the companionway of the boat and blazed again. The Aleut inside the craft emitted a gurgling muffled scream which was followed by the crunching thud of his quivering body.

Black Alf paused, swaying unsteadily on the heaving deck of the tug. A dead white man and two natives lay at his feet; smoke curled from the muzzles of his guns. In the cabin of the *Empress* lay a hundred thousand dollars worth of gold from the Apollo Mine. He had everything his own way.

Convulsively holstering his weapons, he plunged into the cabin, seized one of the heavy leather boxes of gold bars and dragged it out on deck. Then, as he turned to look for his own craft, he saw it settling deeply. The engine gasped, as it sucked in salt water; then it stopped. The boat lunged drunkenly.

Vladonik saw he could not leave the *Empress*. Running into the pilot house, he opened the throttle of the engine and let in the propeller clutch, then steered a wide circle clear of the Pinnacle. He made straight across the Straits of Nagai on the mirror smooth water, in the glow of the early morning, with the treasure and the three dead men.

A RAMSHACKLE wharf jutted from a cove in Bendel Island, like a welcoming hand. A small dilapidated green power boat was anchored near it. Black Alf ran in crazily with the *Empress*, striking the wharf with a heavy crash that shattered the slimy timbers of a fish box.

An old man, small and wrinkly and clad in a shaggy red fox coat, peered down from the sagging old landing. His china blue eyes traveled from the three bodies on the yellow oaken planks of the boat, where reddish streams trickled sluggishly, to the powerful figure of Black Alf Vladonik in the little pilot house. His jaw dropped, with a look of recognition, and at the same time his hand slipped downward, inside his coat.

But he was much too old and too slow for Black Alf Vladonik. The killer's gun came up instantly in his dark hand, blazing like a bolt of lightning. The little old man above him sank gaspingly on to the weather blackened planks of the neglected wharf, while Vladonik sprang lithely upon it.

A cry of pure terror rang out on the still Alaskan air, from the shore. Vladonik turned swiftly toward the direction from which it came. He saw a white skinned girl with hair shining in the morning sun like fine gold. She stood, leaning forward, her hands half upraised toward the figures on the wharf.

Vladonik gazed toward her. His strong arms swiftly tensed, his fingers curled, and his black eyes blazed devilishly. With a brutish cry, he suddenly dashed over the wharf in her direction. His muckluk shod feet thudded like the padding of a wild beast over the planks, as he ran. The girl turned instantly and fled like a terrified doe, straight up from the beach, past a weatherbeaten cabin and up among the rocky cliffs fringing the mountainous island.

Black Alf Vladonik mouthed insane and horrifying yells after the girl. The shouts gave frantic speed to her leaping body. Her hair streamed behind her in a precious golden stream, as she sprang from rock to rock, ascending above the cove. The man yelled at her to stop, and ran in futile pursuit, stumbling and plunging among the boulders of a ravine. In a few moments he had lost sight of the

game. The girl had vanished in the craggy wilderness above the shore.

Vladonik returned to the lava brown beach, ran erratically out on the wharf again and got into the small green boat moored there. Seizing a can of priming gasoline, he plunged streams of the explosive liquid into the greasy old engine, found the starting bar and heaved over the flywheel. He could not get any response. After twenty minutes of futile efforts to start the launch of the old fox-rancher, he threw down his steel bar with a hoarse curse, rushed out on deck and back across the wharf to the *Empress*, the engine of which was still throbbing.

He made a move to throw overboard the bodies that lay on the after part of the deck. The first one that he touched wheezed weirdly. Vladonik dropped the corpse, his own face ghastly. He kicked off the pier lines, let in the heavy clutch, and shot back out into the Straits of Nagai. The three dead men still rode with him.

OVER in Unga that afternoon there was an excited rush down to the beach, at the sight of a disheveled, white skinned girl with hair like rippling gold, who came paddling wearily into the cove in an Aleut *bidarka*. She collapsed at the strand—into the arms of Bob Aunam who held her tenderly while she gave way to soft little sobs that choked her. Her hair fell down her back in a shining cloud over her bedraggled garments, and her pretty feet were bleeding in her torn moccasins.

"Now you can go after Black Alf Vladonik an' spike him with a string of bullets," said Long Gun Hooser, in a crackling voice, to Bob Aunam, when the girl's story had been heard. "You was too easy lettin' him off twice, like you did. Don't see what you did it fer."

"I—I wanted to give him plenty of rope," replied Bob Aunam tonelessly.

"Sure looks like you let him have too much. Here's Phineas Larsen gone, an' Magpie Hansen, not countin' them two Siwashes. You can have my boat out there in th' cove to go after him with. It's bigger than yourn, an' you may have to travel a good ways. Who are you takin' along to help bring him in?"

A colorful throng crowded closely around Aunam, waiting for his word. His face was stiffened and expressionless, but his hands rose and moved a little jerkily.

"I—" he paused; then suddenly his eyes brightened a little, and he went on. "This is my game, I guess. I think I'll go after Vladonik alone. I'll do what's necessary."

Without another word, he turned and went down to the shingle, where he put off in a skiff to Long Gun Hooser's power boat. As he made out of the bay, he smiled rather glumly to himself. That had been a good idea, that of going after Vladonik alone. The Russian, with these fresh crimes on his head, would be more desperate and dangerous to meet than a great snarling timber wolf.

Bob Aunam had no intention of meeting him. He would run over to the Alaskan Peninsula and lay up for three or four days in a lonely, out of the way place called Man Eater's Cove. Then he would return to Unga and say that Vladonik had escaped out of the region. For a third time, fate seemed to be trying to force him into a deadly clash with this killer. Well, he had fooled fate.

"That's a pretty dangerous job Bob's took—goin' after that fellow alone," observed Joe Lyons some time later to his wife, who was mothering and fondling the golden haired girl from Bendel Island.

At this words, the girl sat up in the couch of heavy blankets and skins on which she lay, her face growing still whiter than before and her eyes widening with fresh fear.

"He's gone after him alone?" she gasped.

"Don't be worried," said Joe Lyons awkwardly, while his wife looked formidably at him because of his untimely revelation. "Bob's a quiet fellow and kind of queer in his ways, but he's sure got grit."

IN THE prolonged light of the Alaskan evening two heavily chugging power boats plowed the Straits of Nagai. In each of them was a man in mortal fear. For Black Alf Vladonik's face had lost its inflamed flush, had gone gray. His lip muscles drooped; his eyes sagged heavily began to look dead and lusterless, for all their jet blackness.

There are some men, it is certain, who are too low in the human scale, too bestial, to be capable of remorse; there are others who are too blunted to know any intense emotion of any kind, even fear. But Black Alf Vladonik was far from being one of these. His Russian mother had endowed him with a high strung, superstitious and mystical nature. The anguish and terror of blood guilt was no new thing to him.

Always, before, those accusing faces had faded; those low, spirit voiced complaints had gradually ceased, and comparative peace had come to his unsound soul. But now, with these brutal killings so fresh before him, he saw the placid and kindly china blue eyed face of the old fox rancher of Bendel Island on every bush along the shore. That face gleamed and flew away in each vista, only to reappear in the next, while he knew that if he but turned to look astern, he would see the three bodies lying on the deck of his boat. They rode silently behind him.

Demoralizing terror gripped the heart of Black Alf Vladonik and turned it to spring water. He feared the consequences of his crimes; feared that Bob Aunam would pursue him across the Straits of Nagai and mercilessly run him down. Twice he had met that strangely quiet and mysterious man and felt the cold wind of death fan his cheeks. Vladonik had a superstitious conviction that the third time they met, he would die at the hands of Bob Aunam.

He leaned heavily on the spokes of the wheel; his dark hands grew damp with perspiration as he gave way to his unrestrained fancies. He saw Bob Aunam hurling him into eternity with a crashing, roaring stream of hot lead. It came to him with appalling certainty that some tardy but inexorable fate was closing in on him.

Vladonik was skirting the wild shores of the desolate and uninhabited peninsular mainland. Above him loomed a mighty chaos of white shrouded volcanic peaks. For company he had a rumbling engine, his half crazed thoughts and three dead men.

His agonized mind began weaving plans for escape—plans that were never finished. Fantastic pictures rose one after another before his inward eye. The swift death of Magpie Hansen and the two Aleuts. The thunderous roar of his guns spitting treacherous and infallible destruction at close range. Those slow red trickles across the dark oaken planks of the deck, from the huddled bodies. The peering eyes of the old fox rancher of Bendel Island, gazing down at him from his ramshackle wharf. Bob Aunam was pursuing him now, without doubt, to avenge them all.

Black Alf Vladonik decided that he would head over into Man Eater's Cove, to the northeastward, and spend the night at a ruined cabin there that had once been his father's. It was buried in the alders down on the shore of the mountain rimmed bay and had not been used since Black Alf's erring parent had been brought in to Unga, dead, with a dozen rolls of pirated red fox furs in his old leaky boat.

Black Alf ran into a sheltered bight below the cabin, now the haunt of mountain gophers and sea birds, about half an hour before the late Alaskan summer sundown. He anchored the tug close off the shingle and looked about him.

Two hundred feet up through the sighing alders, a cañon gashed the steeply rising cliffs of the mountain sides. In its mouth, beside a trickling stream of crystal clear water, loomed a black boulder. It was behind this that Black Alf spread out a sleeping bag, after a poor meal of hardtack and canned meat which had been filched from the tiny galley of the *Empress*.

WITH his heavy boxes of loot cached a dozen yards off, Vladonik lay in the gathering dusk, closely covered. His mind wandered in aimless, disjointed leaps, over the events of the day.

That fool blue eyed Swede of a fox rancher . . . didn't want nothin' but that pretty yellow haired girl; first because she was Bob Aunam's girl—he'd heard of that—then; later—well good thing for her maybe that she could run like a doe—her face pinched and white as if she'd seen a snake . . . always liked yellow hair—glowing like yellow gold in the sun . . . liked that, too—yellow gold . . . he had a great lot of that now . . . those soft, round white arms. . . .

The breeze that comes along the Alaskan Peninsula at sunset began to whisper in the alders about him. A few frosty stars appeared, glinting icily in the darkening vault above. A dozen times he was startled by little snapping and rustling noises in the brush. Nerves, he thought. The teeming animal life of the great lonely peninsula was all around him—all the little furry folk.

God! What a fool he'd been to come back into this country. You couldn't get out of it. It was six hundred miles along a stretch of ragged and gale swept coast to Seward. It would take a lot of fuel to make it back in that direction again.

And he'd seen that nobody could get ahead of that big young marshal, Bob Aunam. Mysterious, that Aunam, with the stark icy look that came into his eyes, and as fast as a streak of lightning with his gun. He could shoot before a man could reach halfway to his own weapons.

What a fool to get into all this. Aunam was sure to be out among the islands with a squadron of boats full of armed men. Might be some of them in the cove somewhere by this time. Eyes playing tricks on him; ears too.

A whisper came down the chilly night breeze to him—weird, sibilant. That stoop shouldered, china blue eyed Swede. Would he never let up his sad chiding? It seemed bitter cold.

Vladonik shivered and stiffly rolled over on to his stomach, clawing wildly with shaking hands at his guns. Surely, something was hiding there in the brush. But the minutes passed, and there was nothing, nothing but the occasional rushes of little animals. Curses bubbled against the man's tightly compressed lips.

An icy wind came suddenly, cold and menacing, against his bearded cheek. He fancied he felt a présence, gloomy and depressing. He looked about him, furtively, grinding his teeth together hard, gripping his guns more tightly, struggling to preserve his self possession.

THEN it was that he first heard the distant *ka-chug* of a boat engine, somewhere out in the darkness of the cove. Not a light showed. Vladonik got to his knees, snatching, panic stricken, at the six-guns on his hips. He watched intently for the boat in the black water of the cove.

However, it did not appear. Finally even the heavy rumble of the engine died away.

Black Alf, crouching by the rippling stream in the cañon, breathed easier again. He felt as if he had been holding his lungs full of air for a dozen minutes. He did not reflect that the man in the boat could be making a landing farther up the cove.

Vladonik cursed his rotten nerves. His hands shook, flabbily. After all, the searching boat probably had passed him up completely and was heading on down the peninsula. But still his eyes strained into the darkness.

Then some errant gleam outlined for an instant the quiet features of a large young man who had approached as noiselessly as an Aleut in muckluks through the eerily sighing alders. . . .

Bob Aunam!

Black Alf Vladonik stared. This could be no vision. Inexorable fate had closed in on him, in the person of this man. Deathly fear took Vladonik's soul in its stark grip and shook it to its foundations. It left him in no condition to use his guns.

THE TWO men stared motionlessly across the cañon at each other.

Aunam was speechless, rigid. He had taken the trouble to come into this cove to lay in quietly, and instead, as if by the magic of some evil jinn, he had run face to face with the killer he had hoped to avoid.

Fate seemed to have tricked Bob Aunam after all. There were no watching friends here to impel him to action; he was alone, on his own, with this Vladonik, in the middle of a wilderness. His faculties locked, went into a jam. He was only able to reflect with a half sob of joy that the inhabitants of Unga Island would never know how he had died, would think he had met his death as becomes a man reputed to have iron nerve.

Black Alf Vladonik made a tremendous effort to pull himself together. He started to rise from the earth, started to lift the guns in his hands, but lay still. He was convinced that this was to be his death. That fellow Aunam with his lightninglike gun arm was only waiting, waiting as a cat waits for a cornered rat to try to do something; was deliberately tormenting him.

He waited for the stream of lead that would come roaring from Aunam's gun. Sweat started from every pore of his body. He began to quiver from head to foot. He had had fits of mad fear before, but never had such insane terror gripped him as this. In his struggles to get control of himself, he became more helpless, more frantic. This was death—death itself.

Bob Aunam, big and quiet, stood there in plain sight, waiting for him to try to use his weapons. Vladonik felt like crying out, like weeping; he felt his nerves jumping and writhing throughout his whole body, in maddened expectation of the blinding crash of the marshal's gun. His muscles and tissues gave him exquisite pain. His entire physical being seemed about to curl up. He could not stand such terrible agony—would not—Had that iron nerved man no mercy?

Vladonik's head, covered with thick black hair, had dropped. Suddenly he raised his head, pointed the muzzle of one of his six-shooters at his own forehead. With a convulsive surge of every muscle and nerve in his body, he pulled the trigger.

The muffled roar of the gun shattered the stillness of the cañon like a voice baying up from hell. With the heavy shock of the .45 slug, Vladonik was hurled under an alder bush, his brain shattered, the back of his head shapeless and red.

For a long while, Bob Aunam stood staring at the body of the bleeding, bullet smashed suicide. Then, stepping forward, he murmured—

"I wonder how he could have made such a mistake."

IN THE early hours of the morning, the *Empress* returned to Unga, chugging with a steady, vibrating rumble. On the deck, with his victims and the boxes of gold from the Apollo Mine, lay all that was mortal of Black Alf Vladonik.

Bob Aunam, big and quiet, in his red checkered mackinaw and rubber mushers, was at the wheel. An excited throng swiftly assembled on the strand to meet him; but his only answer to the numberless questions that were put to him was a modest and inscrutable smile. The affair made a tremendous impression on the inhabitants of the Shumagin Islands.

Bob Aunam is still marshal there. He is so respected for his iron nerve that no killer has ever crossed guns with him since, while he is adored as the bravest man in the world by his wife, who used to have hair that shone in the sun like fine gold.

ADVENTURE'S ABYSSINIAN EXPEDITION

Notes along the Trail

By GORDON MACCREAGH

THERE was news at the railroad. A hurrying down the line of important British officials, very stiff and stern and on sacred duty bent. The tail of the British Lion had been badly twisted, and investigations and indemnities were very swiftly due.

The wealthy expedition of the titled Englishman and the Indian potentate had come to sudden and serious grief. There had been bickering and blows. "An unprovoked attack," the official report said. "Fifty men had been killed," rumor said. It was difficult to get anything coherent; but it was definite that the great hunting expedition had gotten well into the Ogaden district and that the fracas, whatever it was, had been serious enough to break it up. It had been abandoned, and the titled Englishman and the Indian potentate were in retreat to the nearest point on the railroad; and the important British officials were on their way down to meet them to learn the true state of affairs, and then somebody would jolly well have to pay the bally old bill.

Here was a story of border raids and sudden death within a few days' trek of myself. It was right in that hunting paradise to which I had been proposing to go before the rain drowned it. I felt like a war correspondent, suffocated with hurry and the impossibility of accomplishing anything.

I wanted to go down into that Ogaden district? Without passports, and in the face of the rainy season? And I wanted caravan boys to come with me? Ha-ha, that was a funny one. Did I know any more jokes?

The African, perhaps, can put more scorn into his derision even than the Oriental. Possibly because he is so blatantly loud about it. But there was no time to waste in fruitless argument. So we resorted to subterfuge.

My lady would stay at the farm while I went on a little trip down the railway, whence I would trek out to visit another German pioneer farmer who had taken up land on the edge of the Ogaden with the hope of growing cotton there. The people there were Ogaden Somalis and that farmer would be able to arrange to take me wherever I wanted to go.

There are many of these sturdy pioneers in Abyssinia. German East Africans, they used to be, till the war took away everything they had and repatriated them. But the lure of the new places was in their blood, and they could never settle down at home. So they came out again to Abyssinia, the new land of opportunity to the north of them that they had always heard about.

On the plea of a railway journey, my good farmer friend found me two new camp boys, and with his own hands shoved them and my camp gear into the next train. It would be up to me to see, when I started into the wicked Ogaden, that they didn't escape. I paid their fares to the conductor, and felt that I had circumvented the African and was well on my way.

IT WAS an eight hour ride. It was evening when the train arrived at the square stone hut with loopholed walls that was my jumping off station. I jumped off accordingly, and waited for my new boys to come and unload the camp gear; for no red capped porters wait for one in Abyssinian way stations. Then I yelled for my new boys. Then I sent the conductor to tell the fools that this was where they got off.

After a long wait there appeared only my Foolish Faithful from the Mission; and he gave me the news that the Africans had once again circumvented me by jumping off the train at the very next station after they got on. Then he groaned and was seized with a terrible pain in the head and lay down and was sick, physically. I don't know how he did it.

I got my baggage off myself. The train pulled out, and in a moment hid itself in its own dust. The rain had not reached this country yet. A scurvy dog came and sniffed at my sick boy and, finding he was not dead, went away again. A tame ostrich waltzed drunkenly down the track in pursuit of the train. The sun swelled red behind the supper smoke from the roofs of a straggly collection of distant huts. Three fuzzy Somalis leaned upon their spears and grinned at me. That was all.

I tried to get the Somalis to understand that I wanted to have my piled camp gear moved off the roadbed. They only grinned some more and said something to each other and laughed. I showed them money and smiled to indicate that I wanted to deal on a friendly basis. Their noses wrinkled and their lips curled like hostile dogs. Not that they didn't like money or were not at that moment wondering how they might murder me to steal it; but they would rather show their independence to the lone Frangi who needed a little assistance.

As of all people, the African, so of all Africans, the Somali has the faculty of putting more contempt into his derision than any other.

Many men have written of the insufferable insolence of the Somali; and their experience has been only of the beast in countries where the white man is lord. The Somali in free Abyssinia is a gratuitous affront to all men, white and black. Never have I more wanted to shoot three men in the stomach all at once.

Deliverance came in the form of a hand car. A heaven-sent Abyssinian inspector of the railway telephone line with two assistants, all armed with rifles and draped with bandoliers. They had a key to the station fortress and they helped me to get my gear in and invited me to sleep there with them.

Upon my weak suggestion that I might just as well set up my tent, they were shocked and told me with horrid gusto that these were very bad people around there; and over the after dinner smoke they told me what *they* thought about

Somalis, and I knew that I had misjudged the race. My opinion had been a pallid thing of weak sentiment in comparison with the truth.

The next day my deliverers piled obligation upon me by devoting the whole of the day to helping me find transport for my gear out to the pioneer's farm; and that, though they ought to have gone on down the line and would have to render explanations to authority later on. Some more hungry Somalis lounged near and suggested offhandedly that they thought they could find a camel or two if I would pay six dollars for the day for each. But the Amhara telephone men urged strongly against having anything to do with them.

Around noon an aged Galla came, heaven knows how many miles, to fetch a pot of water from the station tank; and I knew that relief had come. The old man said he would be able to bring some donkeys, but he would have to go far and he could not get back before evening again. I quickly gave him money in advance to bind him, and I blessed him and told him to hurry.

A long afternoon was to be spent. I suggested to my Amhara friends that we might stroll out and see whether we could perhaps get a gazelle for supper. But they were shocked again.

Those distant huts were the outposts of a small local tribe called Araiyus, and this people's delight was to stalk the stranger within their gates and to drive a spear through him. But they were not treacherous, added my friends. Not like Somalis.

I was getting into cheerful country.

MY GOOD Galla came; though not till morning; and he brought three donkeys and two women, the only beasts of burden he had been able to get. He knew how to load and drive them too. It was a very efficient little caravan. Women make more noise than camels on the trail, but they cover more ground because they don't stop to eat cacti.

The pioneer's farm was on the other side of the railroad from that Araiyu village. Barren, sparse bush country dotted with Somali huts like round mousetraps, and scorchingly hot. My boy moaned horribly all the way about how sick he was, but he never lagged a yard.

The farm itself was, as described, on a river. On a river, in the lower levels of Abyssinia, means sufficiently far away from the mosquito grounds; usually a mile. This river had a belt of heavy jungle along its banks, at least a mile wide. Since moist jungle also harbors mosquitoes, the farm boma, the thorn fence enclosing the buildings, was another half mile from the jungle edge in a treeless furnace of empty plain. Which meant that drinking water had to be hauled a mile and a half from the river. And the farm compound hummed with mosquitoes anyhow. The pioneer's wife had just died of blackwater fever. He himself was down with fever, too, when I arrived.

At the edge of the property I was met by a white man, a relative of the pioneer. He was armed with rifle and revolver. I told him who I was and what I wanted to do. He grinned and said:

"Herr Gott, you come here to make a tour! Come along and see how we live and then decide how far you think you can go ahead."

In the farm boma sat another young white man, checking off laborer's tools for the lunch hour. He, too, sat with a rifle over his knees and an automatic pistol at his belt; though the laborers were Gouragis and Shankallas imported from outside.

I was taken in to pay my respects to the old man in his fever bed; and a rifle leaned up against the bedpost.

That was how they lived on that farm.

The reason was the old, old trouble of all pioneers. The man had taken up his land, about five hundred acres, with all the due formalities of the law; and the first thing he was up against was the ancient question of grazing grounds.

The Somalis and Araiyus had let their camels and their cattle and their goats roam unrestricted over the whole of that

countryside; and now suddenly here came an outlander who said they must keep their animals off because they ate some foolish thing that the stranger wanted to plant.

Neither Somalis nor Araiyus were people to recognize what was meant by a piece of paper which the far away government had given to the stranger. It was only in the vaguest way that they recognized the government itself. And both Somalis and Araiyus were aggressive enough to drive their animals many miles to graze on that very ground just to annoy the stranger.

To a German East Africander, trained to Teutonic respect for government and to Teuton trained natives, this was more than merely defiance. It was sacrilege. Appeal to the far away law brought only more papers, so the outraged pioneer constituted himself the enforcer of the law.

It is testimony to his indomitable persistence that he drove the local herdsmen out and kept them out. Not without fights and stabbings and shootings. But he cleared his land and held it—with as much comfort as our own pioneers used to hold frontier posts. Living on that farm under those hair trigger conditions brought home to me with unpleasant vividness what a frightful life our pioneers must have lived under similar conditions with our Indians.

It meant living under arms all the time; never turning one's back on a strange native; peering through a loophole before opening a door; going out to hunt meat with the permanent fear of being oneself hunted. And all for what? His relations' children—he has none of his own—may perhaps some day, if he works like a dog and if luck never fails, be rich planters in the growing country of Abyssinia.

But that is the history of all pioneers. Let their posterity set up idols to them and slay goats over their graves.

SO MY war correspondent trip was a disappointment. I did *not* get into that part of the Ogaden district where the wreck of the wealthy expedition took place. But I did get in among the Ogaden Somalis and learn the local native gossip.

The whole truth will probably never come out, since the only witnesses are Somalis and Abyssinian police. But the minds of government officials are ruled, not by reason, but by policies. The two governments stand by their respective official versions, and truth has been submerged in the game of political chess. The British government at this writing has agreed to concede only six dead Somalis if the Ethiopian government will pay suitable indemnities; and the Ethiopian government is shifting the pieces while dickering on how much it must pay.

The only unmistakable fact that comes out of the whole case is that the wealthy hunting expedition received the first gory exaggerations of the slaughter before it ever reached the borderland. I can thoroughly believe that every member of the party had had a sufficiency of trouble with the Ogaden Somalis already; and they were glad of the excuse to abandon the hunt and hurry back to the security of the railroad.

So that feminine intuition can once more claim the usual credit. Our own little expedition was a much better one anyway.

THERE were compensations, too, at that outlying homestead that hoped some day to be a prosperous plantation. That belt of heavy jungle alongside of the river was full of things which made mysterious noises at night. The pioneers had been too busy to investigate and the native laborers were too close to the dull oxen to explain.

By daylight—that is to say, by early morning and late afternoon light—it was full, of course, of the usual African bok with the funny names; notably a bush bok as red as red deer. I much wanted to bring home a set of the horns, which were of an unusual shape, and might have turned out to be a new species. But the four enormous hounds that the pioneer kept within his boma to discourage marauders—and kept good and hungry,

too—tore a great hole in the mud and wattle wall of the cook house and ate half my buck and chewed the horns to rags. Heaven knows why, when there were good marrow bones.

It occurs to me that I have said very little about shooting the usual buck and such things. There has been reason, half unconscious, half intentional. Thousands of people have written about trekking in Africa and acres of print have been expended upon the slaying of beeste and bok.

My own attitude in the matter is that of hundreds of others: I would rather shoot with a camera than with a gun. I prefer to watch beasts alive through a fieldglass than to see them dead at my feet. I am no sentimentalist about the thing; but, on the other hand, I am not out to set up a record of slaughter.

Therefore, while I made exceptions for special trophies, I shoot, otherwise, strictly for the pot. I am totally devoid of "sporting instinct". I get as close as I can, rest my rifle as steady as I can and endeavor to kill my beast as swiftly and as painlessly as I can.

It seems to me, then, that, unless some unusual incident should be connected with the case, there is as little thrill in reading about as in shooting deer meat.

There is thrill enough in the other things. There was, for instance, thrill in going out alone into that jungle belt with my ears full of the warnings that Araiyus and Somalis burned with hate against the farm, and that anywhere beyond the actual limits of the property I might chance upon—or worse, be chanced upon by—a party of them.

Yet go alone I had to. The white men, were too desperately busy trying to get ground cleared and seed sown before the rain should come, to think of roaming the bush with me; and my crafty boy, who was a town product and no jungle man, lay and groaned with his multitudinous pains.

Most of us have played at Chingatchgook and Leather Stocking with the stealthy hostile redskins crawling around in the woods. It used to be quite my most exciting and fascinating game. But there were a lot of possibilities in that play that I used to overlook. The same game, played in close jungle, with the possibility of hostile spearmen crawling around, was as much more exciting as it was less fascinating.

Every rustle in the leaves, caused most likely by a bird, every twig that cracked, stepped upon by a fleeing rabbit, brought my heart up to where I could taste it and tightened my grip on my rifle. It *might* have been a prowling Somali, to whom I could be, of course, no more than but another white man come to the farm to harass them.

I hated that game.

It made me feel that I was being constantly followed and watched. Not once, but a dozen times, stealthy sounds in the bush that I just left caused me to whirl round with ready gun. And when I set my teeth and forced myself to walk back, of course there was nothing. Only the drip of moisture from moss and the gloomy green shadows that made one feel creepily alone with the jungle spooks. Then the stealthy sound would be repeated somewhere else.

It is a fool thing to go into jungle alone, anyhow. Not that a boy or a gun bearer would be much protection, but merely for assistance in case of accident. In the jungle a hundred things may happen to incapacitate one—a fall, an attack by a wounded animal, a snake bite. A native boy, though he may run around bleating in a panic, can at least be cursed into going to fetch help.

Any kind of boy; even a laborer from the farm. But hoed ground and cotton seed were more vitally important than the importunities of a stranger who wanted to prowl the jungles when he didn't have to. Besides, those were farm laborers by many generations of heredity, not hunters. They wouldn't enter that dimly lighted tree belt. Devils, they said, lived in the dark jungles; spooks that took the form of leopards and jumped on people's backs.

A faint trace, here, I am sure, of the leopard cult of the Congo side. But I could never follow it up.

ONE DAY I found a footprint. I was following up a faint spoor that looked like leopard, or maybe unusually huge hyena—ask some crack woodsman to tell the difference in leaf mold. Deep and plain in a patch of moist earth with the mark of a ring on the second toe, it was obviously an Araiyu foot. Clear it stood and alone. Not a companion print for yards round or in all the woods.

I felt all the sensations of Robinson Crusoe, and I guess I moved for shelter as fast as a lizard when a hawk's shadow floats over the grass. I shrank under a sloping tree trunk and inched an eye out to peer upward for a gorilla figure on a low branch with weighted spear poised, the way they hunt for buffalo and rhino.

Nothing. Not a branch big enough to bear anything. Not even a tree which a man might have jumped into and climbed. That footprint remained a mystery.

Another day I did one of those stupid things that blockheads do when they have absorbed enough of the hotel lobby stories about the ways of beasts.

In a quiet pool of the river I saw some baby crocodiles busy with the affairs of their life in the shallows. Little two-footers. Well, it is hotel lobby natural history that where the little fellows are there are no big ones. Or rather, to put it more accurately, where the big ones are the little ones keep away; for big crocs gobble up little crocs just as readily as they do little negro boys.

I wanted to observe the doings of little crocs at close range. So I crept cautiously down to the water's edge. A stiff branch like a horizontal bar above my head offered me an excellent hold to lean over and study the doings of the cute little things.

Intuition, or maybe the acute tension of lone jungle prowling, warned me. Perhaps I heard a ripple that didn't belong in that still pool. Anyway, my hair rose and I jumped. I swung my feet clear and jerked astride of my horizontal bar with the single movement of the old gymnasium days.

And *whoosh!* A great tail—forty feet long and as thick as a tree, it looked—lashed across my oozy boot prints and whipped back again. It soused me with spray and abolished the baby swimming school and was gone. The pool stilled again. Not a ripple broke anywhere. Calm and peaceful, it reflected only my God given tree.

I got back to good dry land from my perch like a monkey, by the arboreal route. The natural history that I learned out of that experience was that a crocodile strikes twice. I had always imagined that a single great sweep of the tail was the rule.

Yes, thrills are by all means to be had, roaming the trackless wastes, without shooting deer meat. Incidentally, I wonder whether any of those people who have written their reams and have coined the term, trackless wastes, ever saw one? My own observation is that there is no such thing as a trackless waste.

Every half acre of open plain and every yard of jungle has its tracks. From the smooth, six inch swathes of the driver ants that eat everything as they go, down to the fine needle pricks of scarab beetles, and all the way up again to the wandering, well trodden paths of the larger ungulates. Paths that a man, stooping low, may follow for miles without ever once using machete or belt ax to clear his way. It is unfortunate only that the paths never go where a man wants to go.

But it is jungle alone at night that sets the short hair creeping up and down the spine. Ever since my earliest reading I have admired the fortitude of mighty hunters who have stalked through the midnight jungles without a tremor. I wonder how many of them have not kept looking behind with the certitude that something was going to jump out on them? There's where the gun bearer who walks behind is such a comfort. The things can jump out on him.

There was a moon these nights. With

the last quarter of the moon the rain would come, they told me; so I made the most of it. I went to sit out over a pool. This time for meat. The farm was down to the disgrace of eating guinea fowl; and this was a likely place for a drinking hole, where the bank sloped gently to a hard pebble shore and a sand bank slanted down the farther side of the river.

And all the way out to the place jungle spooks followed me. I could hear them padding softly behind and stepping on dead sticks in their anxiety to keep up with me. I'm sure I am not the first person who has almost run in the woods at night. I could have sworn I heard them breathing.

At my drinking hole I was more comfortable. I got my back against a wide comforting tree trunk, a tall dead tree that threw no foliage shadow and was surrounded by nice noisy dead leaves for many yards round. And there I sat down to wait and wish that I might light a pipe.

And waited and waited, listening for noises. The only noises were more insects than entomology knows anything about. They trilled and they cricked and they hummed and they scuffled. An ordinary beetle can make an appalling noise among dry leaves at night. I cursed them for drowning out the footfalls of beasts that I wanted to hear.

AND THEN suddenly the spooks were there again. In a patch of bush not thirty yards away. They stepped on things and snuffled through their noses and whispered to one another. I knew that they were watching me.

The bush patch was in white flood light; but within was black shadow, and there, I knew, they stood and whisked their tails softly in the grass.

With a stout tree behind me I was not afraid of spooks. I sat without moving and waited for something eatable to come down to drink. But nothing came. They must have winded the spooks. And the spooks sat and watched me out of the dark. I knew they were there because occasionally they moved.

And then, suddenly, I began to know that they weren't spooks. Spooks couldn't tread that heavily on a stick. My skin crawled all over me, loose and prickly. What a fool I had been to swallow that yarn about natives not venturing into the jungle at night! I might have known that it was but another of those pieces of local misinformation. I had had no experience of Araiyus; but I knew well enough that the only good point that Somalis possessed was their courage.

How many, I wondered desperately? And what should be my next move? Plans raced through my brain. Should I yawn and pretend to be stiff and get up and edge round my tree? Or might my action arouse suspicion and bring half a dozen spears out of the bush before I could take cover? Or should I begin shooting wild?

So I did nothing. I just sat tense and took long breaths so that my shooting would be steady when I had to.

The next move was from them. The faintest possible shuffling. My overstrung senses began to assure me that things were not so bad as my first shock of discovery had imagined. I was persuaded that there was only one. I began to reason more clearly. That was thick bush. A man lying there couldn't throw a spear effectively. He would have to come out into the open, or at least make considerable noise of preparation. I would have time enough to take cover if I once got to my feet.

I yawned elaborately, therefore, and got up and stretched so that my rifle butt was ready to drop to shoulder. The man moved again. I dropped the butt to my shoulder and felt that I could afford to give him one chance.

"*Minde-nou ante? Minde fallegal?*" I called. It was Amharic, but he would know well enough that it meant "Who's there? What do you want?"

The answer was another quick shuffle. I had visions of him already standing with arm flung back for a throw. I could never get behind my tree now, and in moonlight one can't well dodge spears.

My nerve gave out. I fired blind into the shadow, slammed the bolt out and in with a vague thought of firing as long as the magazine held out; and, instead of darting behind it, I stood still like a fool in front of my tree.

Crash! In the bush patch. *Smash, whroosh!* at the outer edge. I caught a glimpse of a long spotted form clear fifty feet of white moonlight in two splendid great bounds and disappear again into black shadow.

And I stood still like a fool in front of my tree.

Crash, again. On the other side of the river. My rifle, still at my shoulder, jerked round toward it. On the edge of the sand spit, just outside of the bush shadow in clean moonlight, stood a water buck, head high, ears wide out in alarm, pausing to decide which way to run.

My nerve was gone entirely. I didn't think. I caught the moonlight on the front sight and fired. It must have been a high head shot, for the beast dropped flat without a kick.

And then my wits began to come back to me and I remembered the fast flowing water between us.

A man *always* pays for losing tight hold on his nerve.

There was no use waiting in that place any longer. So I went home. And all through the jungle I never gave a thought to spooks. I was too busy regretting that buck I had shot across the water, and too bitterly busy regretting that leopard I had not shot.

It was later reflection that found time to speculate. Had the leopard trailed me all the way out? Or had it come into that bush patch from another direction when I first heard it? Was it watching me? Or was it, like myself, watching the water hole?

It was clear, of course, why other beasts had not come to drink. But that water buck—had it, too, winded the enemy from all the way across the river and was it also playing the waiting game, lying in the shadow, till my shot startled it into betraying itself?

COLD roast guinea fowl for late supper before turning into my cot forced me to decide upon strenuous measures. In America I have never felt that I could afford the luxury of guinea fowl. Having eaten it in Africa till the feathers began to sprout down my back, I feel that I have missed nothing. It must be that the extra three dollars on the menu in our home hotels goes to compensate the chef for his art that makes the thing palatable. For guinea fowl gathered off the African plain and put into the camp pot is, without any exception, the toughest meat I know.

It is no sort of light snack on which to go to bed. I dreamt the dream of the loaded feet that ran in glue while Satanic hordes of spearmen bore down upon me with horrible speed and then changed into leopards and stalked me through black trees that grew as close as a rail fence.

So I determined that in the morning I would make a catamaran raft and go across and fetch that good water buck meat that lay on the sand bank. Vain thought. The hyenas had been there long before morning; and with the first daylight the vultures had come to see about it. They sat about on the low tree limbs now, too gorged to get out of the slanting sun which was already hot enough to cause them to gasp with open beaks and spread wings.

But I made a catamaran anyhow. They told me at the farm that the other side of the river swarmed with leopards. None of the farmers had ever been there; nor apparently had any natives been across. But leopards were there in plenty. There must be, for the very reason that nobody had ever been there to disturb them.

So once again I fell for the local misinformation and built me a boat; for, having let one good fur rug get away under my nose, self-respect demanded that I go and retrieve my honor. Three six-inch logs with crossbars lashed fore and aft to prevent rolling over made a perfectly serviceable catamaran that crocodiles couldn't upset. I purchased a goat for thirty-seven cents and crossed the

water while there was still daylight enough to pick a good spot in which to lie up.

And, marvel, the misinformation was true! Not a mile from the river I found great padded cat tracks. Huge round pugs, deep imbedded, with bluntish claw tips faintly marked where the soft clay caused the paws to spread. He must have been an old monster. I prayed only that his fur might not be mangy, as those old fellows so often are. Within another half mile I found more tracks; smaller ones, no claws showing even in the moistest places. A young one, this; but big enough for a nice fur. Oh yes, there were leopards there all right.

THE COUNTRY began to open out a bit. Less heavy jungle and more open bush. I found me a nice place to stake out my goat. No tree shadows and about twenty yards clearance all round. For myself I cut a tunnel in an impermeable thorn bush, wormed into it feet first and lay down on my stomach for my long wait like a hermit crab. That is to say, with rifle thrust out where I could see the sights in the moonlight, yet be able to scuttle back into my den should necessity arise. After the first hour spent in picking out stray protruding thorns, I was comfortable enough to wait in patience for the last of the day and the first of the moon.

How that goat yelled! Not the petting *mm-m-mk* of the country lane can-eater, but the piercing, long drawn *blaa-a-a-ah* of the Abyssinian billy; and with fog signal regularity and tirelessness. If leopards were anywhere within a mile that night they would surely hear my bait. I prayed, in my certitude, that it might be the big fellow who would hear it first rather than some paltry little six or seven foot cat.

And then I heard my leopard.

Whrauoo-oo-ough awwoo-ough whaugh-hough-hough-hough-hugh-hugh huh!

Full mouthed and clear. But, praised be the Saints, far away as yet, and, mercy of heaven, on the farther side! *Not* between me and the river.

I had heard that noise in zoos before. I had a horrible picture of a great tawny beast standing with heaving flanks, lowered head and cupped lips as it roared out its notice to all the lesser beasts that it was abroad, not behind bars. And now I understood those enormous cat tracks.

One does not lie up alone on the ground for that sort of cat; not even in the thickest thorn bush in all Africa. Particularly not with a thirty caliber rifle and a hundred and eighty grain bullet. I had all kinds of confidence in my .30 Savage; but that was no load for one of the big four.

The rule is: nothing smaller than .405 for lion, buffalo, rhino and elephant. .457 is better and .475 better still. Rifles carrying blunt nosed bullets weighing up to three hundred and eighty grains and delivering a muzzle energy of close to two tons.

If that is the rule for heavy game, one might well ask why the mighty hunter does not carry such a gun all the time for any kind of game. There are two outstanding reasons. One is trajectory, or that much argued thing, point blank range. These heavy bullets, even with the most modern highest velocity loads, have a trajectory as high as fifteen inches at two hundred yards. That is to say, that, if one aims point blank at a beast two hundred yards away, the bullet will fall fifteen inches below the point aimed at. One must, therefore, guess the distance and run the rear sight up accordingly. Fifteen inches leave plenty of room to miss a buck entirely, and guessing range over a heat shimmery plain is considerable guessing.

Therefore, for lesser game one uses a smaller caliber bullet with a very high velocity and correspondingly lower trajectory. My Savage .30, for instance, has a trajectory at two hundred yards of less than four inches, so that I can snap up and shoot point blank at anything within that range without worrying about the sights.

On the other hand one seldom shoots at heavy game two hundred yards away;

and if one does, one has ample time to consider range and sights. Heavy game shooting is close work, and those beasts require the smashing impact of heavy bullets multiplied by the square of their velocity, or a blow as close to a couple of tons as one can get, in order to stop them, and stop them dead.

Another reason is expense. Those heavy game guns are all European hand-built, and cost accordingly; and our great manufacturers have seen to it that their tottering industry is well protected by a perfectly wicked customs duty. Which is why rich sportsmen all go to England to buy their big game battery.

If I am not mistaken, the most powerful American made cartridge is the .405 for the 1895 model Winchester repeater. A good load; muzzle energy, a ton and a half. But a "leetle bit light," as a man who has shot more than a hundred lions told me, to be dead sure of stopping a charge dead.

Lions, as well as heavier game, have been killed with less. But only the mightiest of mighty hunters dares to sit and wait for one of them at night with a .30 and one hundred and eighty grains.

As for me, I crawled swiftly out of my hole and looked for the well known tree into which mighty hunters climb and spend a safe and comfortable night in a crotch at the base of a limb as wide as an armchair.

That tree wasn't growing in my part of Africa. All the trees that might have furnished that sort of crotch didn't commence to have any limbs before sixty feet up in the air. If there was such a tree, I missed it in the dark. I didn't stop to look long enough. I ran from that place, and I am not ashamed. But I *did* cut loose that goat first.

After that I kept to the plantation side of the river. We postponed for a future date, after the cotton seed should all be planted, a daylight expedition with men and dogs to go across river and perhaps find the king, or one of his relatives, sleeping in the shade of a rock where we could all fire at him together and make up in volume what we lacked in weight of bullets. For the present I would still have to roam alone; until the moon changed and the first rain came. And then all hunting and trekking would be done with till next October.

ONLY a few nights more. And on one of them I saw a devil. It was within half a mile of the plantation, too, in cleared ground. I was out hoping to get some jackal skins. The silver jackal of the Abyssinian highlands has a rufous fur with a wide silver stripe down the middle of the back; much more beautiful, to my mind, than "Hudson Bay silver fox" (dyed rabbit).

From out of the night came a pounding of heavy hoofs. Not the hard sound of horses' or cattle's hoofs; but the duller thudding of broad, heavy feet.

"A hippo galloping like mad," I said to myself.

But what would a hippo be doing so far from the water when feed was plentiful right at the river bank?

It was a night of white moonlight and racing clouds. I couldn't see the thing, whatever it was, but I ran in the direction of the sound. It seemed to remain in one place for a while, prancing and stamping, and above the pounding of the hoofs I heard a screaming. The long, high pitched, screaming of a devil in an awful rage.

Then the galloping started again, and in my direction. I stepped under the shadow of a tree, so that I could see what passed in the moonlight without myself being too clearly seen. And in another minute it was hurtling past, not fifty yards from where I stood.

A vast, dark bulk that might have been hippo gone mad. And on its back was the devil. A black, sinewy shape that writhed and contorted itself and every now and then screamed a blood curdling scream.

Not fifty yards away, in bright moonlight. And I, foolishly, stood in the black shadow where I couldn't see a rifle sight.

I shouted and ran toward the portent holding my rifle clumsily to my shoulder, as actors do in the moving pictures of war scenes. The devil heard me and turned its head. Green flashlights blazed out at me and it screamed snarlingly again. And then it was gone in a patch of shadow, and the mad hoofs pounded on.

Long after I had lost my chance to shoot I could hear them careering wildly on, blundering into bushes, and the devilish screaming floated back on the night wind, till both died out in the distance and I realized that the night was uncannily quiet. Crickets, tree frogs, all insects, had been alarmed into stillness by that thundering passage.

Then a night jar grated harshly above me and a hyena laughed—*whroo-eeh-eeh-eeh-eeh!* There would probably be something to eat if it followed. The tree frogs peeped hesitantly to one another; then trilled out in chorus. The night life of Africa was in full swing once more.

What was it? What drama or tragedy of the night had hurtled like a comet into my orbit and out again? Morning showed great four toed tracks and flecks of blood. That was all. I would have said hippo. But the pioneer insisted on rhino. *I* don't know rhino tracks. But I argued—

"What the devil would jump a rhino that way?" And he said—

"Only the Devil himself."

So I've seen him. And he is black and has green eyes and a tail and long white teeth. Which is perfectly orthodox.

The only other thing that looks like that and has that kind of a disposition is a black panther.

AFRICAN nights, when the moon is out and it doesn't rain, are replete with the thrill of unexpected happening. The seduction of night prowling is full of allure. But there are people who have known Africa all their lives who say that nothing in Africa can ever continue pleasant or comfortable for very long. Something must always come along and spoil things.

It came along and spoiled for me those nights of warm moonlight wandering. I had been becoming scornful about hostile natives. Familiarity with the warning brought its inevitable result of carelessness. I began to persuade myself that the old pioneer, having been at actual hostilities with them, was rather inclined to lay special emphasis on the axiom that Somalis don't forgive.

So, apparently, thought also one of the white assistants of the old pioneer. He was new on the farm. Also an ex-East-Africander accustomed to well tamed natives, and he couldn't believe in the stories of local wildness.

It came Sunday. Farm laborers in Abyssinia, whether they are negroid black Shankallas from the South or Arab brown Tigranis from the North, are all devout Christians on Sunday, who can not work because they must pray. So there was holiday, perforce. Early in the morning this man stuck his head into my tent and said he was going for a walk.

"Without a gun?" I asked. "Or I suppose your boy's got your gun."

"No," he said. "I'm going alone. Just as far as the river. I'll be back for breakfast."

I was the last man who spoke to him.

Breakfast time came, and nobody worried. Lunch time came, and we laughed over him for getting lost. But with late afternoon the pioneer began to be anxious. He had known of people getting lost in Africa before. Not even a tenderfoot could get lost in that place, he pointed out. For a conical mountain peak reared itself up on the sky line as a sign post for miles around.

He routed out all the farm laborers and drove them out in searching parties to shout and to fire off guns. With Teutonic thoroughness he parceled out the search parties fanwise from the boma to the river to cover as much as five miles on either side of his property.

With evening the farthest of the search parties began to come back. They had shouted and they had fired off guns and never an answering shout or a moan had reached their ears.

That made things look very serious indeed. We had been hoping that the man might be lying hurt somewhere and unable to walk back. But if he could not even shout to direct searchers to himself . . .

There remained the dim hope that he might have torn a way with his bare hands through the bush for farther than five miles and that he might not get in till some time after dark. So a great bonfire was lit to guide him; but it was more a gesture than a real hope.

He remains one of the mysteries of the bush. Was it a fall? Or snake bite? Or hostile spear? Possibly time and chance *may* some day tell. More probably nobody will ever know. One can not search every inch of a jungle, even for five miles. A body may lie only a few feet away from a searcher and, unless stumbled over, never be seen. And within two days not even bones are left; for it is only the heaviest bones of large beasts that the powerful jaws of hyenas can not crunch.

There is a worse thought. A sick man, unable to groan very loud, may lie in a jungle tangle only a few feet away from a searcher and, unless stumbled upon, be left lying.

I repeat: It is a fool thing to go into jungle alone.

AND THEN the rain reached even that low-lying district and put an end to jungle running. I was not altogether sorry. I had dodged a good five weeks of the wet by keeping moving ahead of it. Two months of city imprisonment could be borne. Camp gear needed patching. A rest would not be amiss. There was that vague ache in the bones that denoted fever on its way—which I would kill with "Plasmochin" when it came. And I needed a bath.

Perhaps it is a good hot bath in a tub with plenty of soap that one misses most in the jungle. Hurried dips in pools where crocodiles may lurk are too uncomfortable a scramble. Hot water poured over by a camp boy out of a bucket is never very satisfactory. I itched from the bites of sand flies and fleas and all the hundred other insects that nature put into the jungles to discourage tourists from disturbing her primeval peace.

The city, then, would not be without its compensations for a while.

So thought, also, my lady, whom I had left at the farm by the railroad. She, too, itched from the multitudinous pests of the bush. African pioneer farms contrive somehow to do without bathtubs.

Her good saddle horse had died, in the interval, from eating the poisonous herbage that the rain had brought out in the neighborhood of the monkey tree, while our mutinous boys had sat and sulked instead of watching the beast.

More rain was descending in steady streams from leaden skies. Blankets were stickily moist and would not dry. Shoes needed repair. Tents were soggy abodes tramped up with mud.

So that the next bi-weekly train looked very good indeed. We boarded it with thankfulness and came into the city; and the first thing we did at our hotel home was to order baths. One has to order baths in Addis Abeda a day in advance. It is a French hotel.

"I took my bath an' I wallered; for, Gawd, I needed it so."

And so did my lady. And we both still itched. So we went and asked a doctor about it. He took one look, and then we knew the truth.

We both had the *yikuck!*

The microscopic bug that makes rabbit warrens in the skin and lives there till one is mistaken for a leper and fingers and toes drop off.

Just where we had picked it up, we could not guess. Maybe from our faithful mission boy who scratched himself all the time. Maybe from sleeping in a Galla hut. Maybe from just taking hold of a blanket or a saddle or anything that a *yikuck* carrier had touched. Goodness knows, we had taken enough chances of infection.

But what matter where? We had it, and it was well established. Not only on

hands and arms, where one who knows about it may check it quickly. We had given it plenty of time to spread, and it had lost no time in spreading.

The remedy for *yikuck* is to smear oneself with an excoriating ointment for ten days without bathing—well, we were used to that—and then to boil all one's clothing and to throw away those that can't be boiled. Then to take a cautious tentative bath.

If the doctor with a strong glass then pronounces the fatal word, *yikuck*, one smears for five more days and throws away another set of clothing; for the cunning little things come out of their burrows and hide in the clothing till the skin is safe to reenter.

And so on for periods of five days. Or until the excoriating ointment becomes worse than the bug.

Yikuck is distinctly a pest invented by a merciful nature for a people who wear light cotton clothes and can boil each set as they take it off.

As for me, I have only one set of clothes. I mean city clothes.

But I have two months of leisure ahead of me, while it rains, to spend in serious quarrel with the things.

Using A Gold Pan

By Edgar Young

LET'S me and you squat right down here by the side of this crick and do a bit of panning. Heh? You say you air a bit deef? Wall, I reckon I'll have to holler. How do you hear me now? You nod your head up and down. I s'pose I'll have to bawl my lungs out to git you to hear me, fer Ole Yaller Crick is tearin' the bone out of it down this here cañon. What does a deef feller like you want to learn pannin' fer anyhow? Don't shout back at me. I'm not deef—it's you.

This here pan you will observe, without you are deef in yer eyes too, is about the size of a dish pan. Yes, d-i-s-h p-a-n! But she's not galvanized nor tin plated like a dish pan. She's just plain sheet iron that's been pressed into a pan. Heh? You say she is a bit rusty. Yeah, she is. Why didn't I grease it? Haw! Haw! Had too much sense to, that's why. She wouldn't hold the gold if I did. No, she wouldn't hold it if she was slick thataway. And let me tell you another thing. Are you hearin' me all right? Don't you never go to washing dishes in a gold pan when you git ye one. But if you did do such a fool trick remember what I'm tellin' ye. Hold her over the fire until the grease is burnt off and douse her into water to cool her.

See that thar bed of gravel and sand? Old Yaller deposited that when she was out of her banks. She slung it right up here and when she went down again here it was. Then a feller like me comes along with brains in his head and knows what to do. Heh? What did you say? Oh, you axed what I was gravelin' about in the sand fer? Wall, I'm rakin' off the top beca'se gold ain't like sawdust. It won't be on top of the sand. It's down as near to the bottom as it can git. Now we are gittin' down near bedrock. Let's fill her up.

Hey, hold on! Don't git that pan too full. If you git more'n eighty pounds in it she will buckle when you pick her up. Heh? Yeah! Jest roundin' full, that's the idee. Heh? What am I doing with this spoon? I'm gittin' sand out of these here crevices and cracks with it, that's what I'm doin' with it. Can't ye see nuther?

If any gold has been throwed up here along with this gravel and sand it's mighty liable to be in them cracks. It shore is, if it passed over the top of them.

Now we got her roundin' full, ain't we? Heh? You want to know what we are goin' to do now? Why we are goin' to pack her over here to this eddy. Ouch! My bones cracked when I stood up with it. Now is that water deep enough to allow me to souse her under? Nothin' like tryin'. Down she goes.

Now you work some and I'll tell you what to do. I have to holler so loud at ye I feel kinder blowed. Heh? What shall you do? Why, shake her around a bit and scoop off the top with your hands. That way you git the bigger stones and the trash. Gold is whar you find it and she's heavier than lead. She done begin to dive when that water first went in. She'd be right at the bottom if that sand and gravel wasn't in the way. Shake it around and let that gold percolate.

Now you got a pan about half full. More water. Round and round. I'll make a good panner out of ye, deef as you are. Heh? Never mind what I said. Tend to your knittin'. Dip her under. You're gittin' on to it. Jest like settling coffee grounds in a saucer, ain't it? Right! Sling a little harder. Yep! Ye see, you're slingin' the light stuff out. Your water's all gone. Dip her in again.

Pick out the big gravels with your fingers. Don't go to flingin' away any nuggets the size of bird eggs. You won't. I'd have to pack you down out of here if you saw one. It's worse than buckager, that first nugget. Now you're gittin' thar. You hain't got more'n a double handful of sand left. Let me take her now. Watch me close.

See me lay that sand in a light skim up along the side of the pan with a flip of the wrist? I'm layin' her out to look her over. Yep, we've got some flakes of gold thar. I seen a rough speck too. Now watch your pap do some fine pannin'. I'm goin' to hold the pan at a slant. That's why she was made with a flat bottom and sloping sides but with the two meetin' at an obtuse angle. Yeah, that's jest exactly why. A dish pan is roundin' in that corner, but this here pan is sharp and you will notice that the sheet iron is slightly pitted. She will hold the gold like grim death.

You see me puttin' in jest a little water. Watch yer pap git that sand out and leave the gold. Sweesh, sweesh, sweesh! See that sand flirtin' up the side and out over the rim? I reckon I can't be beat!

Now what do you see? Not more'n a spoonful of sand. Main part of this sand is black, ain't she? You said right. It's iron sand and it's the next heaviest thing to gold. The gold is huggin' the pan right under that sand. Now watch me lay her up in a fine skim again. Whoopee! She's speckled. And thar's a grain of rough gold the size of a wheat chaff. See them other bits? Let's pick 'em out with our knife points. Lay 'em here on this buckskin. A dollar's worth? Hell, no. Wouldn't weigh out over a dime.

You can't pick up them teeny little pieces, can you? No, you can't. That's flour gold and your knife point won't hold them. Watch yer pap. See this vial of mercury. Watch me drap a few drops in the pan. Now some water. Round and round.

Do you know whar all that flour gold is now? It's inside of that mercury, that's whar it is. The quicksilver has done swallowed it. Now I'm goin' to take this spoon and pick up the ball of mercury and put it back into the vial. After we pick up some more flour gold with it I'll show you how to git the gold out again. We will put the quicksilver in a shovel and hold it over the fire. The mercury goes up in steam and leaves the gold. It will be all stuck together in one hunk, too. It will be amalgamated.

Heh? Well gol darn your soul! You hain't been hearin' what I said. Well, I won't repeat it. So thar!

A NEW NOVELETTE

MISFORTUNE HUNTERS

By

THOMSON BURTIS

SEVERAL years ago, as the crow flies, an intellectual bozo whose name escapes me sat him down and gave birth to a thought. It was to the effect that as ye sow so shall ye reap. The first time I ever heard this profound remark was from the lips of a lisping Sunday School teacher in the amorous state of Utah. Her version was: "As ye sow so shall ye weep".

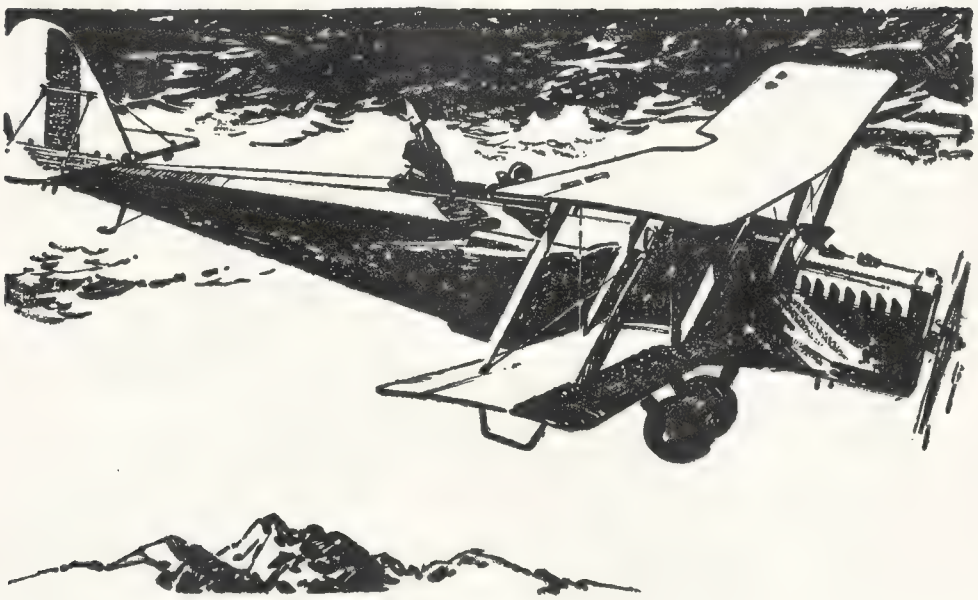
Looking about me, brethren and sisters, it seems to me that a large majority of my friends are sowing so that they'll weep plenty before they die. Including, when the wind is in the east, me, myself, in person, Mr. Slimuel X. Evans, First Lieutenant, Air Service, United States Army.

If I don't weep, I'll probably squawk plenty, anyhow. And a lot of my acquaintances even more so. They wot not a single wot regarding poorhouses, exploding livers or the long arm of the law. They do not even remember that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Scarcely a day passes but what they—or we—stick our heads right into the lion's mouth and believe that the beast's jaws will never get tired.

On the other paw, my good friend, Lieutenant Texas Q. MacDowell, also of the McMullen flight of the Border patrol which the Air Service ran along the Rio Grande had a version of the proverb which read, from left to right: "As ye sew so shall ye rip". He believes, with me, that our rips will be very bad breaks. The only encouragement we've had recently—some dim hope that perhaps we'll get by without paying too heavily for our mistakes—came along to the Mexican Border under the label of Second Lieutenant Robert G. Lane.

Due to the untimely severance of a couple of flyers from the flight, Captain Kennard, our belligerent and well beloved little C.O., had sent for replacements. When at full strength we had only a dozen flyers and observers to make patrols from Brownsville to Laredo. In due time came the news that Lieutenant Robert G. Lane, one year out of West Point and six

OF THE BORDER AIR PATROL



months out of the cadet flying school, would land among us.

When the news reached us, George Hickman, a huge blond observer who was an All American guard in 1916 and still looked it, enlightened us upon the talents of Lieutenant Lane.

"Bob Lane," quoth he, "was probably the best quarterback the Army football team ever had."

Which was the sum total of our information regarding him. None of us had ever met him. His pilot book showed some three hundred hours in the air, and a good record with only a few crashes.

CONSEQUENTLY, we were not unduly haired up that evening as we sat around the recreation room, playing bridge. The train from San Antonio was four hours late, which saved the newcomer from undergoing the usual inspection given new men at four-thirty in the afternoon. At that hour most of the flight was usually gathered on the porch of the recreation building, and a new arrival got the once over, the up and down, and likewise the side to side, from the time he got out of the car until he disappeared.

We had guests for bridge that night, also. None other than Miss Frances Todd and her mother, Mrs. Thomas Todd. Yes, *the* Mrs. Thomas Todd. Her husband was one of the four most prominent and wealthy bankers of New York.

"I still feel as though we ought not to stay," Frances was saying as the time drew nigh for the new arrival. "Won't it be embarrassing for a new man to find women cluttering up the place?"

"A good chance to try him out for his gentlemanly qualities," Sleepy Spears told her in his gentle, almost bored fashion. His square, somnolent face split in the wide Spears grin. "This flight insists on its members being able to handle themselves in a parlor."

This got a laugh out of Frances and her mother. It would out of you, too, if you knew us personally. Living in a camp out at the edge of the mesquite, sleeping in

tents and the rest of it does not apply a high polish to one's social graces. Lack of hot water most of the time saves many a whisker from an untimely pruning, likewise.

I was playing poker over in the corner. While a new hand was being dealt I looked at the ladies and wondered again how they had got that way.

As nearly as I could gather they were social arbiters in the East and could have sprayed Park Avenue with dollars and never missed them. They'd come south to San Antone for the old lady's health, and ended up at McMullen for peace and quiet. San Antone society rolled up its sleeves, spit on its hands and started to show the Easterners what the South could do, until both of them were wrecks.

The point was that they were nice folks. Mrs. Todd was large and stately and motherly. Frances was a little bit larger than the average, and while she had no fashionable stovepipe flapper figure she wasn't fat either. Nor did she yap all over the place about calories and such. She wasn't so good looking. A sort of round, tranquil, comely face, nice smiling brown eyes, and black hair which always showed the ministrations of her private hairdresser. It took several looks to make sure that her inconspicuous clothes were somewhat different from the best a store afforded, and that from the way her hair was dressed to her slippers there was "something" about her.

Captain Kennard and Sleepy Spears were just about the last word, I've heard here and there, in the noble game of bridge. The Cap could make four no trump on one ace and a jack, I understand. The Todds were bridge hounds. One way and another, we'd all got well acquainted and it was far from an unusual sight to see the Park Avenue Todds sitting in kitchen chairs beside a battered card table at the airdrome, playing cards amid a gang of khaki clad flyers whose only concession to their guests was dousing profanity.

As far as I could see, the Todds loved it. And they hadn't looked us up in the Social Register, either.

"Gentlemen, hush!" Kennard said suddenly.

A car was drawing up to the door. It happened that the deal was on at every table. The result of this was twelve pairs of eyes concentrated on the door as George Hickman came in, trailing Lieutenant Robert G. Lane.

"This is Lieutenant Lane, everybody!" George stated.

THE new flyer stood there and returned our inspection with alert interest. He was in a blue suit of collegiate cut, and looked as if he had just stepped off a campus. About medium height, he had powerful shoulders and a slim waist, which showed the athlete. His face was a bit full, but the flesh looked hard. His features were regular; his black hair was parted slightly on one side in the approved college manner. His dark eyes had a nice, level look in them, and somehow they seemed to have an unusually bright glow as they shifted from face to face.

It was almost as if he were waiting for somebody to say something. I liked his poise. Also, I noticed his bow as he was introduced to the Todds. His heels came together and he bent over their hands as if to the manner born. When he shook hands he made me, at least, feel as though he was really glad and slightly honored to know me.

At the end of the ordeal he said easily:

"Captain, thirty hours on that train have got me down. I'd like to turn in, if I may be excused."

"Sure thing."

A second later, with a genial goodby to everybody and a warm smile thrown promiscuously around the place, he was gone.

I saw the Todds exchange looks.

"What a perfectly charming young man!" said the mother sincerely.

Which about expressed what we all thought, I guess. It's a funny thing, but I've often felt that a large group of people

is as big a test of a stranger as can well be devised. As far as birth, breeding, and all that sort of thing goes, I mean. If he can maintain his poise and be neither too shy nor too forward, he's probably got experience and a lot of things behind him; among them fundamental confidence in himself.

NEXT morning at breakfast Kennard said carelessly:

"It's our invariable custom, Lane, to give a check ride to new men. Field's small and level and ships roll a lot. Slim here'll take you up."

"Yes, sir. May I ask—er—something about our patrols? There are other flights all along the Border, aren't there?"

"Sure. All the way to the Coast. Laredo's the next one to us."

"And the object of patrolling is to watch for—"

"Smugglers, rustlers, bandits, what have you," Kennard cut in with his raucous voice. "One of the main items is to be ready to rush to any spot where the ground men call us. And airplane banditry has become common as dirt."

"Must be great fun!" Lane enthused.

"Wait till you've hit the mesquite a few times." Pop Cravath advised him in a dour manner.

"What time does the mail come in?" was Lane's next question; then, "How about telegrams? Are they delivered promptly? And special deliveries and registered mail?"

"Say, you must have wide and varied interests!" grinned Tex MacDowell.

"More likely a girl," was my suggestion.

He sort of flushed.

"No—but I expect important mail," he mumbled.

"Say," he said suddenly. "That Miss Todd is a charming girl, isn't she? A knockout!"

His boyish enthusiasm was as frank and open as if he were registering delight over the winning touchdown in the Army-Navy game.

"I sure would like to know her better," he went on. "She isn't—er—spoken for by anybody, is she?"

This last question asked with a wide grin, was directed at me.

"Nope," I told him. "If you're attracted now, you're a gone gosling. She grows on you."

"Especially," drawled Tex MacDowell, "when you find out her dad's the only rival of Rockefeller and Ford."

"Lots of money, eh?" Lane said carelessly, as if it didn't mean a thing. "Well, I'd appreciate one of you fellows sort of dragging me around to see her some time soon. In fact, tonight."

You must admit that he had about as much self-consciousness as a cow.

"Well, come on youngster," I said, "and don't have women too much on your mind when I'm riding with you. By the way, I'll encourage you to the extent of telling you that she's nuts about football."

"Yes?"

It seemed to me that the light sort of died out of his eyes. For a second his eyes were in his coffee cup, so to speak. The wind was out of his sails.

"What's the matter? Want to be loved for yourself alone, and not as a quarterback, eh?" I kidded him.

He smiled sort of automatically.

"I get sick of hearing about it, I guess," he admitted, as he got to his feet. "You'd think carrying a football meant something."

Which, in a way, set him in more solidly with us all. After all, there are bigger jobs than making ten yards on a football field.

He was silent as we walked out on the airdrome. My DeHaviland was being warmed up violently. The twelve cylinder Liberty was running wide open, a man clinging to each wing and another squatting on the tail, almost hidden by a swirling column of dust.

"I always feel small alongside one of these," he told me as we stood alongside the wing. "It looks too big for the field, doesn't it?"

The airdrome was small. Bounded on the east and west by huge corrugated iron hangars and on the south by

barracks, buildings and tents, it would have made only a speck on the expanse of Donovan Field.

"I'll take her off," I told him, "for that very reason. You'll have to get used to it. I've seen many a good flyer shoot five or six times at this pasture before he got a D.H. in it."

Lane didn't look very happy. His face was set. He couldn't have been more than twenty-two. I thought—

"Desperately anxious to make good on the Border; that's his trouble."

WE CLIMBED in. I looked over the instruments, and a moment later we had turned at the northern edge of the field and were rushing across the sand on the takeoff. I was in the pilot's seat, the front cockpit.

I circled the field for altitude, and at fifteen hundred feet we started down the river. Getting squared away on our course, a mile or two north of the Rio Grande, I shook the stick. That's the signal for the other man to take charge.

I took my hands from the stick, and the nose went down. I grabbed it, shook it again and turned to look back at him. His hands were on the cowling and it seemed to me that his face was pale.

I cut the gun and pointed to him.

"Take it!" I yelled.

He nodded, his lips a thin line, and took it. It didn't take me a minute to decide that he was a rotten flyer.

Handling a ship is a bit like walking a tightrope. One has to balance it constantly. The pilot has to move the stick a fraction of an inch almost every second as aircurrents tip the ship about. Lane over controlled more than any experienced pilot I'd ever seen. When the left wing tipped upward a little, he'd move the stick to the left entirely too far, and the next instant it would be too far down. Then too far up, and so on. The ship acted as if it had St. Vitus' dance. It had a fourway motion, and if ever I rode in a vehicle which was going up, down and from side to side at the same moment, I did then. I felt like a waterbug in a whirlpool.

"Almighty!" I was thinking. "If he's this way in the air, what'll he be near the ground?"

I couldn't figure it out. Gradually, though, he got better. Finally we were roaring along at two miles a minute, and were on an even keel most of the time. His flying, though, was uncertain still.

I was looking about, my eyes shifting from the endless mesquite which billowed away to meet the northern sky to the chaparral of Mexico, stretching darkly to the southern horizon. Suddenly the nose dropped several inches, and I could look directly ahead through the whirling propeller.

What I saw made me lean forward and press my hand against the stick to keep the nose down. There could be no doubt whatever that what I saw was an airplane, flying very low and close to the river. It was coming toward us.

I turned to the grimly determined Lane, and pointed at it. He understood, and the next second we were diving for it. I didn't think about flying myself. I was too busy watching that other plane.

"It probably doesn't mean a thing," I told myself, "but then again it might."

We had had no news of a commercial plane in the vicinity, or of one coming over from Mexico. And airplanes on the Border are considered guilty until proved innocent.

Suddenly I woke up to the fact that I could scarcely breathe, and the airspeed meter was registering more than two hundred miles an hour as the trembling bomber shot toward the earth. With a curse I cut the gun.

"Hasn't this guy got any sense at all?" I asked myself. "He'll last on this Border about one day."

Just to make sure that everything was O. K., I pressed the machine gun control once. The guns answered O. K., so we were all right. Then I shook the stick and took charge.

A quick look around informed me that there was no possible landing field below.

Consequently we'd have to escort the strange plane to a suitable spot for inspection.

We were approaching each other at a rapid rate.

"He isn't running away," I thought to myself, "or maybe he doesn't see us."

NOW I could see two things: that he was flying a Jenny and that he had no guns on it. A bit later, I was aware of the fact that he was having a hard time of it. He was hedgehopping up the river, within ten feet of the ground. Across the clearings his wheels were barely clearing the ground. He zoomed over bushes and mesquite, dropping down as soon as he could to be close to the ground again. He frisked along like an aerial porpoise.

"Good Lord, what a ship!" I grinned to myself as my aged peepers picked up the details of the astounding craft coming toward me.

That Jenny was of the vintage of Noah's ark, and had lived a tough life. It had been patched until it looked like an old fashioned quilt. Some of the patches were white, some black, and there were other shades, ranging from pastels to forthright blues and reds. If it had ever seen the inside of a hangar it didn't show it, and it must have been out in every rainstorm since the flood.

I banked around and throttled down. We were flying within a hundred yards of the river, and our D.H. was a hundred feet above him. I turned to Lane, signaled him to take the ship, and started using both my hands to signal.

The single passenger in the other ship watched me with absorbed attention while I pointed ahead, where there was a field in sight, then down, patted my guns, pointed at the insignia on our ship, and went through other contortions to get my meaning over to him. He sat there, watching me as if I were some new and remarkable species of freak. He neither nodded nor moved. He just stayed motionless.

Suddenly my head snapped back and my swanlike neck felt as if it had snapped. The DeHaviland had stalled, and the nose flipped down so quickly that the back of my head hit the cowling only a split second before my forehead hit the instrument board.

Half unconscious, I realized that we were terribly close to the ground. My hand got the stick and pushed it forward to pick up speed. The stick did not answer. It was anchored.

My head was clearer then. The earth was rushing up at us as the DeHaviland started to spin. One brief look, and the story was told. Almost as I got my first glimpse of Lane's strained face I had my Colt out and was reaching for him. I gave him a terrible blow on the head with the barrel of it, and he slumped back, unconscious.

He had frozen the controls. That means that excitement or fear, or both, had paralyzed him, and he had been hanging to the controls with every muscle tense.

Stick all the way forward, feeling the speed increase, I got the ship out of its half spin. I pulled back. The ground was less than a hundred feet below. Slowly the ship started to level off. All I could do was sit there and pray it would come out in time.

Fifty feet from the river I thought it would do it. It was curving upward. The wheels barely escaped the ground, but they did.

For one exultant instant I thought I'd cheated Saint Peter again. Then there loomed before my eyes the high, thick undergrowth along the banks of the river. The ship couldn't make it. The undercarriage caught in it. As the prop shivered to pieces, earth and sky revolved. We went on our back. For an eternity we hung in the air, and I was looking upward at the sluggish, muddy Rio Grande.

Had it been the ground, the memoirs of Slim Evans would have had finis written to them then and there.

A quick drop, with me curled up as low as I could get, and we had hit with a noise which must have shivered the walls of the McMullen hangars. By a miracle the water was deep enough to slow the speed

of the drop before the motor hit bottom. I was thrown forward under water, but I was still conscious. I unloosened my belt and crawled under the cowling. Gasping and choking, I staggered to my feet. The water was up to my shoulders, and I'm six feet, five inches tall.

The fuselage was sticking out of the water at an angle. The rear cockpit was barely clear, and I could see Lane's body, suspended from his belt. His head, of course, was under water.

Breathless and reeling, half drowned, I forced myself into action. I got him loose, and with the last remnant of strength heaved his unconscious form up on the fuselage, where it hung limply. I almost collapsed against the fuselage. I watched the Jenny momentarily, scarcely realizing what was happening. The clearing opposite me was very small, bounded on all sides by thin, scraggly mesquite. There was a ruined fence on its western edge, also. The battered Jenny was skimming along through an alley in the trees, scarcely two feet high, headed directly for the fence.

In my last moment of consciousness I saw the pilot bounce the wheels off the ground, a few feet from the fence. The Jenny cleared the fence and settled to earth. He had landed it safely in a field which was not more than fifty yards long.

Right there the last one of my mental cylinders cut out. I felt myself going, and I clutched blindly at the fuselage. I fainted.

I RETURNED to this world while lying on the ground. Ahead of me was the unknown pilot, methodically working over Lane's lungs as he straddled the Army man's motionless body. He heard me stir.

"Don't you know that a ship is supposed to land on its wheels?" he inquired mockingly.

"I've heard that somewhere," I told him weakly as I sat up. "How's Lane?"

"O. K. Little water in his lungs. By the looks of that lump on his head it isn't the river that's keeping him in dreamland."

I didn't tell him what had happened. I just looked him over stupidly.

He was fairly tall, and dressed in breeches, boots and flannel shirt which were spotted with oil until they looked black. His brown hair, very curly, hung down over his forehead and added to the reckless cast of his countenance. He looked to be thirty or so, and to have been battered around considerably. His long nose had been broken, although it didn't spoil his appearance at all. From forehead to cheekbones his head was very broad, tapering from there to a thin, square jaw. His cheeks were hollow, and the skin was stretched very tightly over his jaw. His mouth was thin and firm and lopsided, with deep wrinkles around it.

His eyes were gray and deep set and very wide apart. They gave his tanned, grimy face a lot of character. They seemed to be looking out from within him, a sort of mockingly surprised look in them. They were like two lights set back in his head. Peeping forth from under his hair, they seemed to be saying—

"What a peculiar world this is, and what a good time I'm having."

Physically he looked powerful, and there was a sort of careless competence in every move. He looked and acted as if he could take care of himself under any circumstances.

"That was a sweet landing you made," I told him. "Did you have to haul me from beneath the water?"

"No. You were holding yourself up."

"Lucky you didn't crack your ship all to pieces. You must be flush, risking a plane that way—"

"Flush?" he broke in with that lopsided grin. "I've got ten dollars to my name. Didn't want to see you boys drown, though."

A Gipsy flyer, broke. Which made his unhesitating risk of life and bank account all the more noteworthy. I thought of business long enough to explain our actions in the air and to ask a few questions.

"I was bound for McMullen," he informed me. "Thought maybe I could bum a little gas and take up a few passengers. I've been flying for the movies in California until I got sick of it. Stunt man."

"In that ship?" I couldn't help saying, and he threw back his head to laugh the louder.

"In *Matilda*," he chuckled, and then quoted, " 'Her prop is bent and her wings cave in, but she's a darn' good airplane for the shape she's in'."

"Well, what's to be done?" I asked myself and the world in general. "If we tore down this fence, do you think you could get off and get to McMullen? They'll send after us."

"Sure," he said without hesitation, and we proceeded forthwith to knock down a section of fence.

When he moved he was certainly a sight to see. I never saw anybody whose motions were as sure, quick, smooth and apparently effective. His shirt was wet, and you could see the muscles underneath working like a nest of snakes.

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later a D.H. arrived under the chaperonage of Jimmy Jennings. Lane was still unconscious, which was lucky for him. I had at least a bushel of choice adjectives and epithets which were dying to escape from within me into the hard cold world. I held him on my lap in the rear seat, and as we flew along I cooled down. He looked like such a kid, without a bit of harm in him, that phrase after phrase dropped out of my vocabulary.

The air seemed to revive him, and he was wideawake as we spiraled down over the airdrome. No sooner had Jimmy reached the line and cut the motor than Lane said calmly:

"Don't say a word, Slim. I know all about it. I've got something to tell the whole bunch, and I might as well do it now."

They were at lunch. Tex came to the door and announced that we were both walking under our own power, so nobody else got up. Soaked as we were, we went to the mess hall and I answered a couple of questions without mentioning Lane's peculiarly effective part in our adventures. The Gipsy pilot was there. Out on the line I'd noticed a ring of grinning mechanics gathered about his moth eaten crate.

"Captain, I've got something to say," the pale faced Lane said steadily as we sat down. "In fact, I'd rather get it off my chest to the whole bunch. The wreck was my fault. I've lost my nerve."

As I have mentioned, the boy seemed totally lacking in self-consciousness of any sort. Dead silence fell over the mess hall. His eyes had a funny glow in them, but he humiliated himself with dogged determination and disarming frankness.

"I shouldn't have taken the ship over," Lane went on steadily. "It works peculiarly with me. I get so nervous and jumpy in the air that I can't fly right to save my soul. I've been that way for weeks."

Nobody said a word. All of us had sampled that feeling which was now his. It meant weeks, sometimes, of misery during which you curse yourself for a yellow bum while you toss through sleepless nights of dread of the morrow.

"The favor I want to ask is this," Lane went on carefully. "There's only one cure for me. That is, fly it out. Will you let me fly for a while as an observer? I'll fly every patrol—the more the merrier. If I spend enough time in the air, it'll go, I think, and I can fly myself."

The admission of yellowness, even if temporary, would be a terrible ordeal for me. I'd sooner confess to burglary. But there he was, laying his cards on the table before us all, as if we'd understand.

Kennard's eyes flickered to Major Searles, our flight surgeon. The wispy old major nodded.

"O. K.," said the C. O. "Damned if it mustn't be a bad case, though, for you to freeze controls!"

The remarkable thing about Lane, to me, was the way he avoided any apparent depression. As soon as the captain's

decision had been made, he seemed to snap right back to normal. Not a trace of brooding or shame was discernible in him.

THE LIFE of the party, so to speak, was Billy Masters, which was the Gipsy pilot's name. He talked freely, and a few judicious inquiries brought to light the facts that he had been in the Royal Air Force during the war, stayed with them and flown in Egypt, left there for the oilfields in Persia, ended up in the Mexican oilfields and while there had bought a ship and done some passenger carrying. The same *Matilda* was the ship, and he had flown her to Hollywood six months before to enter the movies as a stunt man. Tiring of that, he had driven *Matilda's* ancient bones along the Border, carrying enough passengers to pay his expenses. He had no money and no plans.

"Probably go from here to San Antone," he stated, "make a little dough there, and maybe take a job for awhile. Who can tell, who cares, and why worry?"

"Can Miss Todd and Mrs. Todd come in, sir?"

It was an orderly, and a moment later the Todds were greeting thirteen men.

"Please excuse us, Captain, but—oh, there's Slim and Lieutenant Lane!"

It was Mrs. Todd, and she seemed as relieved as if we had been her sons or something.

"We heard that there had been a terrible wreck," she went on, sinking into a chair. "I'm sorry we ever met any of you boys!"

Frances, tall and serene, nevertheless registered as much quiet happiness as had her mother. They were real folks. They started to leave, but first the captain introduced them to Masters, with a brief mention of his share in the episode.

Mrs. Thomas scrutinized him rather closely, while he was doing the same thing to Frances.

"Your face seems familiar," she announced, lorgnette in hand. She wielded a lorgnette fluently. "You weren't born in New England, were you?"

Masters' smile was more one sided than ever. He seemed to be highly amused.

"Yes, ma'am," he answered, "in Boston."

"You're not related, by any chance, to William Gardner Masters? That's who you look like! I know now—"

"He was my father, ma'am."

"How perfectly fine! Your father, young man, was once a dear friend of ours. He died during your first year in Harvard, did he not?"

"Yes, ma'am."

We stood around, open mouthed. Mrs. Todd was tremendously interested, and Masters was enjoying himself.

"I had no more relatives; there wasn't any money left, so I joined the Royal Air Force, drifted around, and here I am," Masters told her.

"Mother, I think we ought to have the heroes of the crash for dinner tonight," said Frances with one of her sunny smiles.

Lane smiled a glorified smile himself, for all the world as if Frances had been thinking only of him.

"Of course. Can you all come?" asked Mrs. Todd.

"I fear I can not," smiled Masters with a polished bow. "My entire wardrobe is on my back."

"Borrow some clothes," Frances said quickly.

"If that can be arranged, it will be a pleasure," Masters answered.

If ever a man was getting perverse enjoyment out of a situation in which the ordinary mortal would want to sink through the floor, it was he.

That night, in borrowed paraphernalia which did not fit any too well, Masters seemed to have himself a whale of a time. The Todds had about half a floor in the McMullen Hotel, which was no mean hostelry, and the word hospitality was coined for the brand of entertainment they put out. Mrs. Todd was the kind who asked you to straighten a picture for her just to make you feel at home. During the evening Lane worshipped Frances in quiet delight while Masters

talked glibly, authentically and humorously about his adventurous career. He held the center of the stage, but it was Lane who always lighted Frances' cigaret. The good looking youngster's well bred presence was always felt, and at the end of the evening I imagine he, in his quiet way, had made about as big an impression as the star attraction.

IT SO happened that I was sent to El Paso the next day on a special mission, and didn't get back for a week. I landed after dinner and, after grabbing a bite, I sought the tent of Mr. Texas Q. MacDowell, who, being officer of the day, was about the only man left in camp. It was Saturday night.

"How are tricks?" I inquired.

"Which ones?" he countered.

"Any excitement since I've been away?"

"As quiet as a New Hampshire Sunday," he drawled disgustedly.

"How's Lane getting along?"

"He isn't flying yet; but he rides the back seat about five hours a day. If the air'll fix him up, it's getting plenty of chance. He'll have more hours than Eddie Stinson if he keeps on."

"Masters still among us?"

"Prominently among us. He and Lane have struck up one of these closer than brothers things. When Lane gets tired of riding DeHavilands he takes a trip with Masters. And every evening they gallop down to town and play bridge with the Todds."

"Rivals for the fair Frances?"

"I wouldn't be surprised," MacDowell stated. "As near as I can figure it, Lane's head over heels in love, and would be the same if she was a waitress. Masters figures on her as a financée as much as a fiancée."

"How's he doing, and what, if so, why, in a professional way?"

"The boys fixed up that senile ship of his, and he's carrying quite a few passengers. Have a drink and pour me one. He flies from that Young pasture a few miles west of town. I'll be damned if I know where he gets all his money, all of a sudden though. He's bought more clothes this week than the Prince of Wales did last year. The lilies of the field are only dandelions now."

"Maybe he got credit down town," I suggested as I brought the tankards to the table. "What sort of an egg did he turn out to be?"

"Swell. Maybe talks a little too much, but he's got plenty to talk about. Get him to tell you the story of how he met the Shah of Persia. Or the time he flew Ethelyne De Vere, the movie actress, to San Diego and the trip took four days. He's got a million of 'em."

"Lane turning out all right?"

"Yeah. Great little guy, at that. Quiet, you know, but he grows on you."

We talked along casually, taking a drink now and then, and finally adjourned to the office, which was really where Tex was supposed to hang out. I suddenly woke up to the fact that it was two-thirty in the morning.

"I shall shuck the clothes, scrub the snoot, and hit the hay *pronto*," I announced, and proceeded somewhat unsteadily, but nevertheless in a dignified manner, down the line of buildings and thence down the line of tents toward my own.

Fifteen minutes later, in slippers and bathrobe, I was making my way down the boardwalk from the bathhouse.

One tent was lighted. From the others reverberating snores announced unconscious life within. The lighted tent was Lane's.

As I got close to it, my slippers making no noise, I heard guarded voices. A second later I could recognize Lane as the speaker.

"Damn it, Masters, I'm not made of money. I tell you I can't do it!"

"Five hundred, I said, or else . . . "

That was Masters, his voice low but with what almost seemed like the hint of a laugh in it. Then and there I threw all scruples aside. I skidded quietly around the tent and crouched at the back of it.

"But I haven't got it!" Lane burst forth, almost a sob in his voice.

"Borrow it, then."

"I'm a new man here—I can't borrow that amount! For God's sake, Masters, be yourself. I've given you—"

"There's a bank downtown," Masters advised him sardonically. "Officers can borrow almost anything against their pay."

"You're unreasonable, I tell you! I—"

"Maybe I am—but I haven't talked yet. Think it over. And remember, it's only a loan."

I could almost see that lopsided smile as he said those last words. I held my breath as he left the tent and strolled down the boardwalk toward his own. As I sneaked in the direction of my own domicile I was thinking:

"That sounded to me like blackmail. And they're supposed to be bosom pals. What the hell has he got on that kid Lane—and what kind of an *hombre* is Masters—of the Bahston Masters?"

I FELL asleep wondering about it. Next morning I could scarcely believe that it had happened. I didn't see either one of them at breakfast, but after lunch I could readily understand that I hadn't been dreaming the night before. If Lane and Masters acted like friends at that meal, the late war was a game of run sheep run between friends.

They did not exchange a word except for two gibing remarks by Masters about the rotten bridge that had been played the night before. And that same evening Lane did not go to town with Masters—and Masters was bound for the hotel.

"Say, big boy," I remarked to Tex, "if I didn't know you I'd call you the world's blindest mortal. If those two are friends—"

"Something happened," Tex cut in. "They have been. Did Lane fly with him today?"

"Come to think, Lane did get the captain's permission and fly with him this afternoon," I admitted. "That's funny, at that."

During the next three days it got funnier. Lane still persisted in flying with Masters, but to all intents and purposes there was fundamental enmity between them. In the second place, Lane and Frances had evidently split in no uncertain manner. He never went near her. In the third place, he did take out a note at the bank. I endorsed it for him. And in the last place, if ever I saw a kid going through the tortures of hell it was he. It seemed as if that round face of his got thin, and his eyes shrank back in his head, and he was unbearably nervous. Sometimes, when he asked for mail, he was like a drowning man asking piteously for food.

I watched it and stood it for three days. I'm a dumb clodhopper from the tall brush of Utah, inexperienced in the ways and methods of romance or the more tender emotions. Subtlety is just a word to me.

However, I could not banish from my bean the memory of that conversation I had overheard, and it looked to me as if I ought not to mind my own business but should put my Number 12's squarely into the soup.

Consequently, I made some careful inquiries and discovered that in the opinion of such experienced connoisseurs of love and passion as Pop Cravath, our twice married adjutant, and Sleepy Spears, a Don Juan of parts, Frances and Lane had given every indication of strong attraction for each other. He did seem like one of her own kind, at that, and the consensus of opinion was that he was strongly entrenched in her good graces.

I was wondering, you see, whether blackmail had anything to do with the sudden severance of relations. And yet, when I started on that tack, it became impossible to think of that frank boyish youngster having any skeletons in his closet.

Nevertheless, I made an afternoon date with Frances. I can talk to a woman frankly because I'm the Woolworth tower of mankind and as homely as an artist's nightmare. The only time a woman's eyes rest on me for longer than a second is when she is wondering—

"Do I really see this, and is it a face?"

I met Frances in the lobby of the hotel.

"Frances," quoth I, "I have a particular and very important reason for asking a very personal question. I haven't discussed the matter with a living soul. What I want to know is this. Did you and Bob Lane split for any reason except a personal disagreement which is none of my or anybody else's business?"

For a moment she sat there, her big brown eyes fairly stabbing through me. She had on a floppy hat and a white sport outfit, and she looked every inch the thoroughbred she was.

She answered my question without embarrassment or quibbling.

"I don't understand it myself, Slim," she said very quietly, and there was sudden pain in her eyes. "He told me that he wasn't worthy to be our friend. He said that some day we would understand, and that some day whatever—whatever it is that's on his mind would be removed.

"And he said that when that time came, which might be soon but might be a year or more, I would be the first person in the world he would look up."

That, I knew, was every bit of it. She had given me the works, from A to Z, without false modesty or pride. I don't know why, but suddenly I reached over and patted her hand.

"You're a peach, Frances," I told her. "And thanks."

"You wouldn't want to tell me—" she faltered, and I shook my head.

Right then I knew that Lane had dug himself a private nook in the heart of one Frances Todd.

"I can't. But I'm sure there's something on the kid's mind and I want to get it off, for his welfare and the—er—the good of the flight," I floundered.

Going out, I came to a conclusion that was inescapable.

"He is in wrong somewhere. Masters knows about it, and is blackmailing him because of it," I told myself. "But blackmail is an ugly word, at that. Maybe it isn't that—oh, hell, I don't know!"

A SUDDEN thought hit me as I was revolving ways and means. I could go to Lane and ask him to spill the news, or I could maybe scare it out of Masters. Before that, though, I could satisfy a certain amount of curiosity I had. A certain amount of curiosity, with me, means that my hide's so full of it there's no room left for common sense, caution, or good manners.

After some thought, I commissioned a young lawyer friend of mine who was an ex-flyer to make a trip of some five miles and report to me by telephone. I received the call an hour later, at the field.

Just one minute after I had hung up the phone I was flinging my feet excitedly in the direction of Captain Kennard's office. As I burst into the sanctum like a racing car through a fence, bald headed Pop Cravath looked at me with a jaundiced eye.

"Slim's got news, which means it's bad," he observed to Kennard.

The stocky captain sunk deeper in his chair, put his feet on the desk and ran his hand through his spike pompadour. His prominent gray eyes held a cold glint in them as he saw the storm flags flying on my face.

"Shoot, Slim," he rasped crisply.

"Well, Cap, the guy that we know as Lieutenant Lane isn't Lieutenant Lane at all!" I blurted.

"Huh?" grunted the captain, and Pop acted as if a bee had stung him.

"He can't be!" I rushed on. "Listen. In the first place, I never was exactly right in my mind about that first check flight of ours. Freezing was all right, but the way he handled it in the air to start spelled amateur, and not yellowness, the more I thought of it. In the second place, I went snooping around and overheard a conversation."

Whereupon I repeated the gist of the little chat between Masters and Lane.

"It sounded like veiled threats to me," I told them. "Then I went down and saw Frances to get the lowdown on the sudden break with her, and perhaps, on the side, the sudden coolness between Masters and

Lane. Before that they'd been buddies, I understand."

I told them what Frances had told me. Pop's face was red as a beet, and his bald head was sweating. The captain was motionless, but his eyes were fairly popping from his head.

"With all this," I continued, "I got to thinking. And I wondered whether the same threats which had extorted money—"

"That money accounts for Masters' prosperity, too," the C. O. interjected.

"Sure. Whether the same thing couldn't be responsible for Lane's saying what he did to Frances. He spoke the truth, doubtless, but Masters made him say it. Then I got to figuring why he should still continue to go over to Masters' field every chance he got. So I sent Jack Perry out to look over the land—gumshoe around as inconspicuously as possible. And he just told me that Lane, supposed to be a graduate cadet and had two hundred or more hours in the air, is learning to fly and Masters is teaching him. In fact, Masters soloed him this very day! There can't be any mistake. Jack knows flying as well as we do!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" barked Kennard, his feet coming off the desk and hitting the floor with a bang. "That yellow stuff he pulled was just an excuse to learn to fly by riding a lot, huh? It all dovetails, all right."

"Know what it means?" exploded Pop Cravath, pacing up and down. "It means, that the real Lane was murdered or kidnapped, and that this impostor is down here for no good!"

"Of course. But what the hell is he here for?" snapped Kennard. "If it was a big smuggling plot or something, he could learn to fly before he came here, couldn't he? He was taking a million to one chance by coming down here and not being able to fly at all!"

"And I'll be damned if I can figure that boy a murderer or a big criminal," I started. "I—"

"There's something unusual, or else he's the world's nerviest, most deceitful and accomplished thug!" stated Kennard.

"Know what I believe?" I told them. "I believe that Masters, some way, got wise to Lane's being an impostor. Masters is an adventurer of probably no particularly religious or moral turn of mind. In place of exposing him, he decided to blackmail him, on the excuse, if necessary, of teaching him to fly. Or maybe Lane's plans are so big Masters wants to string with him. Say, how about this guy Masters, anyway? Could it all be a frameup?"

"No!" the captain cut me off decisively. "As a matter of cold fact, Masters is a reserve officer right now. A week ago he applied through me, giving all facts about himself. I just heard from Washington. Every single tale he's told—that is, his birth, education, ancestry, R.A.F. record, and so forth, are exactly true. He's William Gardner Masters, Jr., of Boston, Massachusetts, without a shadow of a doubt."

"He wanted to go on active duty for awhile with us," Pop Cravath told me. "The nerve of this Lane! Captain, it means the real Lane is murdered, I tell you—that our Lane is down here as the representative of some gang of thugs—maybe steal our ships, smuggle—Lord knows what!"

"It sounds like the only explanation," I agreed, "but I'll admit I don't know where I stand. I can't believe it, some way. Here's what I suggest, Captain. Everything under cover, of course. Get the Government dicks looking up the real Lane. Report all this. Look up Masters for fun. If there's anything up, he's an accomplice now, isn't he? Then we shadow Lane and Masters every minute of every day for awhile, with Government help, of course. Wait to see what he's up to. It's a cinch that if he's as daring a criminal as he seems, unmasking his impersonation of an officer won't force him to confess anything. And Masters, that grinning devil, is hard as a rock and twice as strong. He couldn't be made to talk easily. But if we give 'em rope, we can hang 'em with the goods on!"

THERE was more conversation, of course. Finally, before Masters and Lane got back, the flyers and the trusted noncoms were gathered together and the situation placed before them. Inconspicuous surveillance, doubled guards, all the details were worked out.

Just in time, too. They landed shortly after the mass meeting broke up. As usual, Lane's first question was about mail. To date he hadn't even received a postal card.

The telephone lines and telegraph wires were red hot for about two hours that afternoon. At dinner the boys carried things off rather well, considering the circumstances. I said little, but my eyes rarely left the haggard face of the supposed Robert Lane. Neatly groomed, boyish despite the strain he was under, he was about the last man in the world one could figure an impostor.

Masters was a bit different. I guess that overheard conversation had colored even his physical appearance for me. With the drooping forelock shading his devil may care, somewhat battered countenance, he assumed the appearance of a sardonic Mephistopheles masquerading as an angel.

I think our espionage system worked pretty well. Certain it was that not a moment, waking or sleeping, were they free from scrutiny. Everybody chipped in, as casually as possible, and I doubt whether either Lane or Masters had any idea whatever that their sudden lack of solitude was prearranged.

Next morning, shortly after I'd returned from the eastern patrol to the Gulf, Captain Kennard called me into his office.

"Well," said he, "I guess you were right. Lane came this morning and said he was ready to fly. I let him take a ship, with Tex MacDowell in the back seat. He took it off right well, too."

"He's had almost fifty hours in the back seat, as well as instruction," I pointed out. "There's one thing the boy has—guts—anyhow."

"Sure has. And we've heard, among other things, from Los Angeles and other points. Reserve officer Masters is O. K., technically. But Los Angeles Federal men say that just before he left he was strongly suspected, without definite proof, of doing a flourishing business carrying chinks from Tia Juana to any one of the numerous fields around Los. Quite a flourishing industry out there for Gipsy pilots when motion pictures are slack. He was being watched."

"And he'd been in the Tampico oilfields," I pointed out. "Perhaps a—er—wide acquaintance around Mexico, huh?"

The captain nodded.

"A Federal man from San Antone will be in this afternoon, and the real Lane is being traced, of course."

The drone of a ship reached our ears.

"Bet that's Tex and Lane coming back now," I stated. "Let's see the landing."

The landing, it may be said here and now, was excellent. Lane hadn't ridden all that time for nothing. He got well back of the fence which bounded the northern edge of the airdrome, glided in conservatively and squatted her down with only one bounce. Furthermore, according to Tex, Lane had made the landing unassisted.

TEX JOINED us in the office, and soon Pop Cravath drifted back to his post of duty. From the outer office, all of a sudden, came Lane's voice.

"Any wires for me?"

"Yes, sir," was the unexpected reply from the mail orderly. "Just came in this second."

"Yeah?"

That word was so full of heartfelt joy that it made the building vibrate.

"Damn it!" rasped the captain. "We should have had a chance to open that. Well, we can find out from the city office—"

"Lieutenant Lane requests permission to speak to the captain, sir."

The impostor was always the triple distilled essence of military courtesy. He averaged up for the shortcomings of all the rest of us.

"Alone?" barked Kennard.

"No, no, sir; it doesn't make any difference."

The wire did not seem to have aroused any tremendous amount of joy in his bosom, at that. He seemed relieved, but the settled melancholy which was rapidly aging a sleek haired collegian into a line faced man was still upon him. He seemed lifeless, somehow. I remember thinking at the time—

"If he's a criminal I guess he's inexperienced and has poured out more than he can drink."

"You all might as well know now as any time," he told us steadily. "In the first place, I'm not Robert G. Lane at all."

We didn't pretend surprise.

"We've known that for a day or two," Kennard told him. "Who the hell are you?"

"I'm Miles Peabody, his best friend."

My mouth dropped open so far I could have surrounded a whole creampuff without touching a lip.

"Then how the hell do you come to be committing the high crime and misdemeanor of impersonating an officer?" snapped Kennard.

"Do you mind if I tell you that later, sir? This wire is from Bob. At last he's free and is on his way down here. Oh well, before I go into this narcotic thing I might as well tell you—"

"Dope? What?" yelled Kennard, while the rest of us just stood there and gaped.

"First I guess I'd better tell you from the beginning. The dope thing though is very important, and if you'll let me maybe I can make amends."

The boy had hold of himself, now, and there was a gleam in his eye which was like the one I'd known when he first hit the Border. He straightened, now that he had laid his cards on the table for better or worse. Those broad shoulders squared and his mouth got tight.

"Bob and I are lifelong friends. I work in Norfolk now. In fact, I went to Annapolis a couple of years before resigning. Bob stopped off to see me on his way down here. No need of going into the details. I got him cock eyed—both of us—while we went slumming through a lot of waterfront places. He was in civies. To make a long story short, I, drunk, dragged him into a place—insisted on it—where we had no business being at all. Worst dive of cutthroats and bums I ever saw. A man started to beat up a woman and Bob jumped in. We got in a peck of trouble. There was a knifing and all that. I woke up in a hospital, and finally found out that Bob was in jail under an assumed name, for attempted manslaughter. The gang in the dive had tried to frame a knifing on him.

"I knew he was due down here right away. I also knew that if he were found out he'd be asked to resign from the Army, at least, for being in the mess.

"I was about crazy. Finally I got the best lawyer in Norfolk at work, took Bob's stuff and started. I knew he'd eventually get out. That bunch of bums had laid the blame on him, but the police knew 'em. I figured it was just a matter of a few days. When I started down here I just had an idea that I'd look over the land, and maybe be able to fix things up with you people so he wouldn't be in too bad. I knew that nobody down here knew him. I wasn't sure what I'd do. I thought you might not report that he was overdue if you knew the circumstances.

"It isn't his fault; it's mine. I left word that I had everything fixed—had reported for him, and everything."

"Well I'll be damned!" Kennard said slowly. "Go ahead, young fellow."

"When I got here I was taken for him, of course. In fact I'd wired to stall things off—and I just sort of let it drift and decided then to impersonate him a few days. When he came I was going to make him fix up a cock and bull story with me. I'd slip into Mexico and he could lay the blame for jail on me and I could presumably have deliberately impersonated him for some criminal reason, see?

"I wouldn't have cared. I haven't got any folks or anything, and I've got a little money. It would blow over."

I STOOD there, listening, and I'm supposed to be pretty hardboiled. But I believed every word of what he was saying.

"Now, though, things are different. I'd be telling you this whether I'd got this wire or not. For several reasons. And if you people find out that I've told the exact truth, and will let me, maybe I can really do something for you and—" right here what was almost his old boyish grin appeared on his face—"get a few years less in Leavenworth."

"Why are you here instead of trying to get into Mexico?" I demanded.

"Because of what I'm going to tell; because there are a few boys to be rounded up and because—"

He hesitated for a minute.

"Because I think I want to save Frances Todd, perhaps, from the mistake of her life."

"Now the soup gets thicker," observed MacDowell, his eyes starting to dance with anticipation.

"Three days after I got here, Masters, through an accident, got wise to the fact that I was an impostor. We'd become close friends. I liked him a lot.

"As soon as he found it out, he hinted that he wouldn't say anything—for a price. Right then, of course, I spotted him as crooked and I figured that telling him the real reason why I was impersonating Bob wouldn't alter things at all. Naturally, he thought and still thinks I'm here to steal ships or something or other.

"So I got him to teach me to fly, and all that. Here's the point. Two days ago a perfect stranger started talking to me in the McMullen, and in two shakes of a lamb's tail I knew that he knew I wasn't the real Lane. Which meant, as far as I can see, that Masters had blabbed."

He looked at us questioningly, and Kennard nodded.

"He made me a blunt proposition. He wouldn't tell on me, and he'd pay me a thousand dollars a trip to boot. As soon as I got soloing, I was to do something once a week. I'd find, buried in a field ten miles west of Carana, a large package. I was to land when on patrol, pick it up, and fly it to San Antone on some excuse or other."

"Dope, of course!" Kennard half whispered. "Right on the bank of the river, huh?"

Peabody nodded. Tex and I looked at each other. It was all perfectly logical. Landing contraband on these shores was comparatively simple. Getting it north in that deserted country was a problem.

"Go ahead!" Tex commanded with a grin of pure delight. He could feel action on its way.

"Well, I figured Masters had tipped them off and was in on the deal without appearing personally. Also, he'd made me lay off the Todds, and I figured he was after some of that money of theirs—if not all of it. He stands strong, especially with the old lady. As soon as I could, I was going to tip them off, but I couldn't then.

"Anyhow, when the dope thing came through I knew I'd have to talk to you, Bob or no Bob, and straighten things out. And I figured I could do something, as well. So I pretended great interest, said I'd do it, and also said that I'd be interested in bigger deals. Get right in with his gang, and clean up. See?"

"Good boy!" yapped Pop Cravath suddenly, and blew his nose loudly.

Captain Kennard's scarred face was a study. His eyes were glued to the youngster's face as if he were seeing interesting pictures there.

"I figured I could get in with them and find out all about 'em, see? Carry dope, if you'd let me, and then Federal men in San Antone could trace everything, not making a move until everything was known from Tampico to the last place the dope goes. They trust me not to blab, because I'm supposed to be a criminal already, see? The last thing they figure is my tipping you off.

"Honest, Captain, please let me do it! You can find out who I am easily. I won't try to escape or anything. This can be a big haul, I tell you!"

Kennard leaped to his feet. I think

that every one of us had forgotten entirely that Peabody was a technical felon.

"When's the first trip to be made?" he snapped.

"Tomorrow. I wired Tampico that it was O. K."

"What did they say about your going into it heavy?"

"Great. In the end we can nab the men that plant it on the river and everything. This bird that talked to me was from Tampico. German. Address is the Rio de Janeiro Hotel. We can get 'em from soup to nuts, see, as soon as I make a trip or two."

Conversation was hot, heavy and acriminious from then on. The entire flight was for trusting Peabody. When the Federal man arrived that afternoon he was finally won over, especially after two long distance calls to Norfolk. No promises were made Peabody as to what would happen to him in the end, and he asked for none.

IF MASTERS noticed any particular signs of excitement among the bunch at dinner that night he didn't indicate it particularly. He was in a very genial glow after several cocktails, which was unusual for him. The contrast between him and Peabody was striking. In every action and look of the younger man's there was discernible his hatred for Masters. That competent gentlemen seemed to be mentally kidding his prey every minute. There was subtle mockery in the way he requested him to pass the salt. In divers casual comments on things in general I thought I could sense a saturnine undercurrent of contemptuous kidding, aimed at Peabody. Masters despised his victim, it seemed to me.

Liquor oiled the ball bearings upon which his tongue seemed to run, and never had he been more entertaining. Suddenly I got myself a thought.

"I never have looked into that bird to see what makes him tick," I told myself. "Peabody turned out a surprise. Maybe this one will."

It would be a good precaution to take for the welfare of the flight in general, and besides that, I was interested personally.

Consequently, right after dinner I eased over alongside him and said:

"I've got a little real good brandy in my tent. Like to drop over and have a *café royale?*"

"I'm way ahead of you!" he told me, and when I had bribed the chink to deliver us a pot of coffee and a couple of tankards we adjourned to my canvas palace.

As soon as we were set I took advantage of the first lull in the conversation to say suddenly:

"Say, Masters, I don't want to be curious, but from what the Todds hint, it seems a funny thing for you to be batting around in a debilitated Jenny. You ought to be a rising Boston business man or something—"

"All depends on what you want to do—where you get your fun," he told me with that lopsided grin. "I happen to like a certain amount of variety. A few dozen relatives shake their heads over their morning codfish balls up around the Back Bay, and shed a tear or two over the black sheep. What the hell do I care?"

"Live your own life in your own way, regardless, eh?"

"Sure. Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't anybody? We didn't ask to be born, did we? Twenty per cent. of us are born lacking something or other and condemned to a life of misery, aren't we? Ninety per cent. in the world are born poverty stricken, condemned to keep their noses to a smelly grindstone for life, aren't they? You and I may be hearing a doctor say next year, 'You'll die a slow and torturing death from a cancer in your stomach'. The breaks are all against it, and the man that doesn't grab at any chance he has to squeeze a little juice out of existence is crazy. He owes no duty to anybody or thing except himself. Why should I care about what my relatives think?"

"Carry that idea a step farther," I sug-

gested, "and murder would be excusable, if it meant some reward for you."

"Sure. If the reward was big enough. If I'm a better man than somebody else, and take what he has away from him that I want, he's got no kick. Let him find somebody he can lick and take his. I want mine out of this life, and I get it."

"It'd be a hell of a world if everybody—"

"Sure. If that time came I might think differently, or else I'd take more than my share. All this tommyrot about duty and honor and the rest of it, designed to make a man a slave to something or somebody all his life, is the bunk. Look out for yourself. Ten thousand bucks means food and a roof over your head, and you can't live on the recollection of how kind you were to give all your money for twenty years to some weakling who couldn't get it for himself."

He seemed interested in what he was saying, and there was a fundamental hardness in him which I could feel. It wasn't a shell grown by hard knocks; it was a deep psychological quirk which had been born in him.

"Blackmail is just a matter of course, if he thinks it'll help him along," I thought. "He wouldn't even be ashamed of it if he was in court right now!"

He was on his feet now, as if preparing to go. Perfectly dressed in a double breasted blue suit and a soft shirt, he looked and acted well born. On his face, however, there was that quizzical smile, as if he were getting amusement out of noting my reactions.

"Of course," he said, "I'm talking about big things, not little ones. I've met hundreds of people I'd give a hundred dollars to when I had it and they needed it. Good friends, that I liked. But if my life's happiness depended on getting the wife or the job of one of them, do you think I wouldn't try to beat them out of what I wanted by every trick there is in the book? If you don't you're crazy! I should be a martyr to save somebody else unhappiness!"

"Well, that's that. I'm going to town."

"The fair Miss Todd, I presume," I said.

"None other!" he said carelessly. "A truly charming young lady, although hard to get acquainted with."

That was said with such mocking humor that I was sure he was absolutely confident of the success of any plans he had. He'd got Peabody out of the way, and by hook or crook he'd get some of the Todd money.

AS I STROLLED to the recreation room I was thinking:

"No suspicion of Mr. Bull Masters will be far fetched, if it depends on whether or not he's capable of the dirty deed. He's capable of anything!"

A man made hard or dishonest or weak by life can be made normal, usually, or at least influenced. Masters was one of the few people, men or women, whom I've ever met who was born to disregard all laws, social or human, as naturally as a lion kills its prey, and with no more inner consciousness of wrong doing.

I figured that Peabody might run into town that night himself, but he didn't.

"I'd rather wait until—I've sort of proved myself on the level," he told me, "and until we've got the goods on Masters."

"Which, of course, we haven't yet," I agreed. "He did cover up an impostor, and right now he's a reserve officer. But he might worm out of that by saying that he wasn't sure, or something. And there's absolutely no legal proof, except your word. And before the law, you're a criminal and your word has no corroboration whatever."

"And his connection with the dope angle is unprovable," Lane pointed out. "As a matter of cold fact, the gang might have found out something through agents in Norfolk. Of course, I'm positive that that isn't the case, and that he's the guy—"

"Say," I interjected, "if he's got his eye on the Todd fortune he might be stimulating this business just to get you thoroughly and completely in bad, see? So

that your name would be mud automatically and no cock and bull story about protecting your friend would mean a thing with Frances. You never told him about the real Lane, eh?"

"No, I guess he thinks I bumped the real Lane off."

THE NEXT morning at ten o'clock Peabody started, supposedly on patrol. In the event that the smuggling ring had spied, which they probably had, he went alone and without any fuss or furor. He was to radio us as soon as he got started for San Antone. Up there, of course, the shadowing system was all ready. He was to be met at an outlying field by an automobile, and to the occupants thereof he was to hand the package.

Masters was on the airdrome at the time, and his face was more perversely saturnine than ever as he watched the takeoff. Hat on the back of his head, that lock of hair over his eyes, he looked casual, but very bright eyed and unutterably wise.

PEABODY hadn't been gone five minutes, and we had started strolling toward the office, when he said suddenly to the captain:

"By the way, Cap, now that I'm a full fledged reserve officer, I'd like a flight in a D.H. How about it?"

Suddenly that casual thought of mine, expressed to Peabody and the other boys at intervals the night before, flashed into my mind again. If ever I saw mental telepathy work, it was between the captain and myself. It might have been helped some by my dropping back and nodding.

"Sure," said Kennard easily. "Take Slim along here in the back seat. It's a check flight, you know."

"O. K.," Masters said without hesitation.

He went after his flying stuff after giving orders for a ship to be warmed up.

"If he makes a beeline to catch Peabody with the dope about, that'll mean something, won't it?" I inquired of Kennard.

"And he wouldn't object to me being along. In fact, he would like it, to prove his point. The more I come to think of it, Cap, the more I think that the son of a gun figures on double crossing his smuggling pals, to get Peabody! Just to get him out of the way completely killed while carrying dope. After all, Peabody, if caught, could label Masters a blackmailer, which wouldn't be nice, even if he wasn't convicted. Circumstantial evidence would be strong. Masters could say he'd got wise to Peabody, but didn't want to say anything until he was sure."

The captain nodded.

"Let's see whether he takes a gun, just for fun. This is supposed to be a mere check flight, you know."

And sure enough, Masters came out with a gun strapped around him. We always carry Colts on patrol.

"Why the gun?" the captain asked casually. "You're not on patrol."

"Sure enough!" grinned Masters. "Just put it on without thinking."

It almost seemed that he could read our thoughts, because he unstrapped it.

"Take this back to my tent," he ordered a mechanic. "No need of being weighted down with that thing."

I was tingling with anticipation, for some reason, as I got into the back seat. I couldn't be sure, of course, that anything would happen. But I felt that there was a good chance of it. In fact, I even hoped so.

He looked over the instruments casually, ran the twelve cylinder Liberty wide open for a moment, then eased the throttle back with a practised hand. He was an airman, no doubt about that.

He taxied that DeHaviland up the field as if he'd handled one all his life, turned it neatly, and gave her full gun without a stop. I never touched the stick as he rocked her off the ground and climbed conservatively, with plenty of extra speed. He circled the field for altitude in the approved manner, continuing until we were up about two thousand feet.

"Now what are you going to do, my boy?" I reflected. "You're sure taking

your time if you expect to do any business with Peabody, at that."

To my surprise and disappointment he turned due south, and started for the river. He wasn't thinking any more about catching Peabody than he was about running for alderman.

"Wrong again," I told myself. "Maybe though, my presence scared him off, at that."

IN A MOMENT we were over the river—still flying south!

The belt in the observer's seat goes all around your body, and its anchor cables have play enough to allow the observer to stand up and have free movement. I leaned over and shook him, as I cut the gun.

"You can't fly over Mexico; it's against international law!" I shouted.

He turned, and never will I forget that grinning face. The goggles gave the last touch to it; he was a gnome of the upper air if there ever was one.

"The hell I can't!" he grinned at me. "You're in for a long ride, and you'll come back on foot, unless I see a field to drop you in!"

The motor went on again as I sank back and tried to crank up my stalled mind. In a moment it was clear to me. Masters had discovered the espionage placed on him, some way, and had an inkling of what was up. I guess a bird as keen as he was had figured the fake Lane no real criminal, as well. If he suspected that they were being watched, the fact that we'd allowed Peabody to fly off alone had made him believe that something was wrong, and that he might be the goat.

He was making his escape, and stealing a ship in the bargain. Leaving his gun behind had been necessary to avoid confirming the suspicions he felt we had.

"God, if I had a gun!" I groaned. "But I'll get him, maybe."

I stood up. For a second I had a horrible suspicion that he had a gun hidden in the ship. No, he couldn't have. He hadn't been near it since the suggested flight except when he got in, and there had been no way for him to know to which ship he would be assigned.

He looked back at me, crouched forward against his belt. Again I cut the engine.

"Turn back, or I'll choke you unconscious!" I yelled in his ear, my hands resting lightly on the back of his neck.

He leaned farther forward. All seemed suddenly quiet, save for the whine of the wires. Then he put the throttle all the way on, and the airblast was choking and strangling me.

I leaned forward a bit farther, too. Then, so suddenly that I still can't believe I could move so fast, a short, ugly looking bar of iron was flashing upward at me.

I got a glancing blow, but by the luck of the devil and some miraculous speed in my reflex action, I was not knocked unconscious as I dodged. I fell back over the stool in the rear cockpit, my legs in the air.

As I struggled up he had unloosened his belt, was standing up and turning as that metal bar, which he had hidden somewhere about him, went back to beat me unconscious.

The plane was in a dive, now, the motor fairly screaming and the wires blurred streaks as they shrieked and trembled with the speed.

If that blow ever descended on my head—I couldn't grab his arm—

More by instinct than anything else, I saved my life. In the same motion I jerked the stick back and jammed my right foot against the rudder. The big bomber swooped upward, flipping over on its back as it zoomed.

Masters was thrown against the side of the cockpit. His aim at my head was ruined. An instant later the DeHaviland was entirely on its back. His body—those clutching hands and that contorted face I will never forget—hit the upper panel of the center section. I held the ship upside down, and as I hung against my belt his body hurtled out into space.

I had the stick all the way forward, and I forgot to pull it back. There I hung,

looking upward in fascinated horror as he fell, head over heels.

I didn't see him hit, for I had to pull the trembling, overstrained ship out of that terrific negative dive and get it rightside up again. Then I saw his corpse. He had landed flat, legs and arms widespread, and his body had dug a hole for itself, many inches deep.

I FLEW back to McMullen in a highly serious mood. Bill Masters had paid for his philosophy about life, and scoundrel that he was, I didn't feel proud of what I'd been forced to do. Back at the field, though, I began to feel better as I talked it over with Kennard.

"We'll make it an accidental demise," rasped the captain.

I nodded.

"That'll be best," I said, "so that the dope smugglers won't be scared off. You know, I think he must have made that gesture about the gun—taking it right off when we mentioned it—because he was so wise to us that he figured we wouldn't let him fly at all if he took it. He had the bar to use if I objected to being temporarily kidnapped, and he wouldn't have shot me anyway, except as a last resort."

"That seems reasonable," stated the captain. "I'm sure, too, that his plan was to have Peabody sucked into this smuggling thing and then Masters figured that he'd catch the kid in the act and bump him off with a good excuse. Be a hero himself, and all that."

"As well as curing Frances of any attachment for Peabody," I added.

"He suspected that his jig was up," the C. O. went on ruminating, "and figured escape was his only salvation. He didn't dare try to steal a ship, because he knew that he was being shadowed very closely. He got wise to that trailing business some way, that's a cinch."

"How about Peabody?" I asked. I'd almost forgotten him.

"He sent a radio; he's got the package and San Antone is waiting."

"Good boy!" I yapped. "We weren't wrong on him, anyway."

An hour later the Department of Justice in San Antone called up the captain, and a considerable conversation was had. Kennard turned away from the phone with his eyes glowing.

"All O. K.!" he barked in great relief. "The kid got there all right, delivered the stuff, the Government picked up the receivers and followed them, and they know right now where the stuff is stored and there's no chance of 'em not being able to follow every last ounce of it to its ultimate destination. And they say that the outfit is entirely unknown to 'em, looks big and that this is going to be a real haul before they get through!"

"Great!" I said with as much relief as the captain had shown. "Which makes me ask the captain's permission, sir, if he'll be so kind as to allow Lieutenant Evans to leave the post for an hour?"

"Leave, and go to hell while you're about it," grinned the cap, and I cavorted into McMullen to hold converse with Frances.

No reason why I should butt in, at that. I'm just a peculiar soul, and one of the few real kicks I get out of life on the ground is to be the bearer of good tidings. The only time I enjoy the opposite pleasure is when I lay down my hand and say:

"No good. I've got an ace-full."

I told the queenly, quiet Frances the whole works. When I finished there were tears in her eyes as she said—

"The foolish, wonderful boy!"

"Just thought I'd horn in in case he got cold feet and didn't give you the real dope," I said as I prepared to make ready to begin to start to leave. "He may not be a quarterback, but he's a good sport as well as an admirable fool."

He got back three hours later, and he listened to a rapid narration of the deceasing of Bill Masters with very close attention.

"He deserved it," was his verdict, "and can't squawk any more than I can when I get mine. It may ruin further smuggling, though."

Which, I may say, it did. The Tampico gentleman held no further communi-

cation with Peabody, but left hurriedly for South America. In the next couple of weeks, however, I have the pleasure of informing you, Federal agents made themselves a fine haul of wholesalers, retailers, addicts and go-betweens.

THE REAL Lane arrived in a couple of days and greeted his old friend Peabody, who was under technical arrest. The Todd apartment was his jail most of the time. After considerable to do, fuss, feathers, red tape and common applesauce, Lane was absolved of any real blame for what had happened. It couldn't be otherwise, after Peabody's testimony.

The quixotic Mr. Peabody, in person, got off, finally, with a thumping fine, and a sentence to Leavenworth, which was suspended. I don't imagine the fine will cause any less meals to be served in the ménage of Mr. and Mrs. Peabody, *née* Frances Todd. In fact, I can't see that they've even shucked a footman.

This little matter was cleared up within a month after the arrival of the real Lane, and when all was set and he had departed northward with his bride, Captain Kennard, Tex MacDowell and myself journeyed over into Mexico to get a bit of relaxation. Hanging over our tenth bar I remarked—

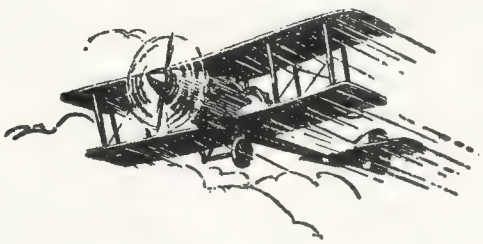
"Well, I wonder what the moral of Peabody's little experience is, if any?"

"The moral," drawled Tex, as he squinted into a brand new mint julep, "is, if you want to land an heiress, pretend to be a flyer."

"But don't be one," suggested Kennard. "No flyer, by any manner of means, is ever worth a nickel."

"Until he's dead," Tex pointed out. "Ten thousand bucks then."

"It's worth that," Kennard said unfeelingly, "to get rid of 'em. When I retire, I never want to see another one. Not only are they cuckoo themselves, but every cuckoo in the world is drawn to 'em! Take Peabody. Nuts. But lucky. What a flyer he'd have made!"



The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

The Genesis of A Novel

THE ARTHUR O. FRIEL serial which begins in this number, is so much a flight of fancy as well as logic, and so different from any of this author's previous tales, I am glad to be able to add a word from him concerning it.

For once I feel like talking about a story, rather than about the facts entering into its fictional development.

First, I do not write "to order". The editors can corroborate this assertion. In all the years I've been writing for *Adventure* they have never given me any order, request, suggestion, or whatnot, concerning the nature of the next story to be worked out. Nor have I asked them to. I figure that it's up to a writer to work out his own ideas, not ask a busy editor to do his thinking for him. So I write what comes to me when it comes, and just where it comes from is more than I usually know or care.

But now, in writing "*In the Year 2000*", I know where the impetus came from, and I don't mind telling. It came straight from some of you readers who saw previous Amazonian tales of mine in *Adventure;* also from some who read the same tales in book form. The old guard among you will recall those stories—"The Pathless Trail" and "Tiger River" and "The King of No Man's Land"—in which McKay and Knowlton and Ryan and Rand had some hot times on the upper Amazon with José Martinez. And since they were written I've heard from folks now and then to this general effect:

"Look here, you left José and Rand down there establishing a new kindgom in the middle of the jungle, but you've written nothing more about how they made out. What became of them? Did they succeed, or didn't they?

—ARTHUR O. FRIEL

P. S.—Since the foregoing was written, European dispatches have quoted Marshal Foch as predicting another "world war" within twenty years. To ex-Kaiser Wilhelm has been attributed the assertion that the war would come in half that time—in 1937. This makes my own forecast look weak and timorous by comparison. Well, we'll see who is right.

A. O. F.

Mountain Night

Splash of the moon on a cabin floor.
Lace of the trees through an open door.
Whisper of wind, and a star or two
In a treetop game of peek-a-boo.

—OSCAR E. JENSEN

Impersonations

NEVER having read of a case similar to that which forms the basis of the Burtis novelette in this number, I asked him about the possibility of such an incident actually happening.

His reply:

Before writing "Misfortune Hunters" I gave careful consideration to the plausibility of its theme.

Of course, during the war, there were numberless instances of impersonation of officers, often high ranking, which were finally exposed in the newspapers. How many were never exposed will never be known, I presume.

Coming down to the definite sort of impersonation which is a part of the story, I simply put myself back in the Army, stationed at a small post with ten flyers such as Godman Field, Kentucky, or any border post. Time after time I have seen an officer whom nobody knew ordered to a post where I was. An officer simply shows up, as ordered, and reports as Lieutenant Robert Jones, we'll say. As such we meet him and know him and accept him.

Under such circumstances as are narrated in the story, I am willing to put myself on public record as saying that a clever impostor, provided the real officer has been put out of the way, could last on a post for an indefinite length of time. If a flyer, he could last until somebody came around who knew the real man, unless his imposture was discovered through his lack of acquaintance with other flyers at different posts.

I do not recollect any thought of requiring definite proof of identity. Robert Jones is ordered to our post. An officer arrives and says he's the man. He is; that's all.

—THOMSON BURTIS

I'll Let That Wish Go Double!

AND MANY thanks, Comrade Rogers. If we tackle those oysters, though, make it a bushel—and let me bring along a pail of freshly made horseradish . . .

I wouldn't go so far as to accuse *Adventure* of getting into a skirt, even temporarily; but some of the things that have got by of late conjure up visions of rolled socks and lipsticks and necking parties. It is not easy to put one's fingers on any exact spot where this is indicated, but from time to time that impression of things "*quæ ad effeminados animos pertinent*," obtrudes itself. To me, The World of Adventure is a place where "there is neither marrying nor giving marriages". Talbot Mundy's women fit in. Gordon Young's do for the most part. Some of the other writers' do not.

You and I are both inclined to remember where we got something good to eat. I shall have in mind until memory is lost that roast of deer meat that the squaws sewed up in rawhide and suspended in the fire until it was—well, not too done, but done just enough. Or those lumber camp beans that the cook insisted could not be cooked right in less than two days, so we only got 'em every other day. Also that stew that Emerson Hough told about that takes three weeks in a hunting camp to bring to perfection. It takes many kinds of meat and all the vegetables you have to make it right. How would you like to sit down on the sand beside a half a bushel of fresh caught oysters with a knife and a bottle of pepper-sauce? If I had any company, I should want more oysters. But what's the use? The best I'll get today is chicken and I don't know yet how it will be cooked. I am just an amateur camp cook myself and can concoct some things that are edible, but those things that require the simplest treatment always suited me the best. Steak and roast, for instance.

I hope to start on a trip to the land of N'Importe before long, taking a general northwesterly course from here. If I can come within hailing distance there are some of the A. A. staff that I am going to show the error of their ways. That man Wiggins is one of 'em. Why, he was telling some fellows what kind of a gun to take to Alaska, and he never even *mentioned* my favorites! Ain't that the limit? Honestly, I had rather read a page of Wiggins' gun dope than one of Tuttle's stories. And that's saying something. If I get close enough to his place, I am going to call, and that's more than I would do for any president of my time, except one.

Like many others, I was very sorry when A. S. H. left his place at the head of the Camp-Fire. My best wish for you is that you may win as warm a place in the hearts of those who sit on the outer edge of the circle, as he held.

A word as to the covers. I wanted to yell when I saw the old pictures come back. The other style was—well, not a frost; it was a hard freeze.

—E. G. ROGERS, Lynne, Florida.

A Famous Pirate

H. BEDFORD-JONES has used a fiction writer's privilege in his swashbuckling novelette appearing in this number. But probably his interpretation of the final circumstances of Every is fully as close to the facts as would be chronicles resting upon rumor and bandied legend.

The name of Every is variously spelled, often Avery, but that of an Old Bailey indictment quoted by Seitz is here used. Most of the incidents have some basis in fact, though I have not stuck to the description of Every's settlement, which was at Ste. Marie; and the letter left at Santa Cruz was actually sent to the Governor of Bombay.

The escape of "Captain Willing" and Every's end will be liable to dispute; but who knows? Johnson and Smith, the two contemporary writers, do not agree; Smith says he lived out his life as king in Madagascar; Johnson says he settled in Bideford and died a poor man. Nobody does know how he ended, so if I could turn his end to improve a good moral tale, his life was not wasted after all. And if the Mogul's daughter did not do what she did, she should have done so, so why not? There's a nice tongue-tripper if you read it aloud!

—H. BEDFORD-JONES

Another Treasure

THE DISCOMFORTS of this search would not be in any measure as severe as in the case of the Mexican emeralds mentioned in a late issue; but Comrade Bridges justly demands a rather special knowledge in one who wishes to be his companion.

I have been sitting near the fire for a long time listening to the strange and thrilling tales told by others. I have found a lot of information here, so I am coming to Camp-Fire for a little that I have tried in vain to get, for several years.

But first I must tell you a story of murder, loot, and buried treasure.

First I will say, I was born and reared in southwest Texas. Grew up among cowboys and cowmen, and have known Texas and Texas history from childhood.

A few years before the Texas cowmen started trailing their herds to Kansas, a few of the adventurous ones started driving theirs to Colorado.

There were two such men thrown together and took a large herd to Colorado. They made the drive safely, sold the herd of beeves and started back to Texas.

There was no paper currency in those days, or at least very little. So they were paid in gold. About eighty thousand dollars, so the story goes. It was safer for one or two men to attempt to get through the wild country than for a bunch. So they put the $80,000 in gold in a pair of saddle bags, put it on a pack horse and started out alone.

They reached the Texas prairies without serious trouble.

One night they camped near a soldiers' camp. It was not a regular post, but probably a detachment on scout.

In some way the soldiers learned or suspicioned the cowmen had the money with them.

Next day after the two cowmen had left, two of the soldiers deserted, stole a couple of horses and followed them. After riding for some time they overtook the cowmen and rode with them. Some time later they came to a swollen stream. They rode down to the water, and stopped to let the horses drink. The two cowmen in the lead.

The two soldiers pulled their guns and killed the cowmen. Their bodies fell into the water and were washed away.

Then after killing the cowmen they got the money and headed toward Austin.

They rode for some time possibly a day or so. Then while watching their back trail they saw a band of horsemen following them. They supposed it was the other soldiers trying to capture them. They hurriedly buried the money under a live oak tree. Digging two small holes putting one saddle pocket in each. Taking out what money they could carry they headed for Louisiana. One of them was killed in a house in the red light district. The other was captured by the soldiers, court-martialed and sentenced to be shot. As the day of execution drew near and all hope was gone, the condemned soldier called one of the guards, who had been very kind to him, supplying him with tobacco and other things.

So the soldier told his guard how they had killed and robbed the cowmen and buried the money.

"We were both northern boys", the soldier said, "we enlisted in the Army and were sent down to Texas. So we were not acquainted with the country. But the money is buried on what is known as the Pike's Peak and Austin cattle trail somewhere west of Austin."

Then the soldier drew a map of the country and the location of the buried money, giving all the details as to where the money was buried.

By figuring how far they rode per day and how many days it took them to reach Austin he gave the guard a close guess to where they buried the money.

The guard came to Texas and hunted for the money but never found it. Then he and his son hunted without success.

After the old guard died the son gave the map and story to my cousin, and he let me in on the deal. But we have been unable to locate or find any one who ever knew where the old Pike's Peak and Austin Cattle Trail was. If we could find any one who knew just where this old trail crossed the main streams in West Texas I think the stuff could be found if it is there, or if the landmarks haven't been greatly changed.

So if there is anyone around Camp-Fire who has ever heard any more of this story or knows anything about the Pike's Peak and Austin Cattle Trail, by working together we might learn something definite about these buried saddle bags.

Well I'll throw on another chunk and sit down.

—LLOYD BRIDGES,
2739 Oregon Street,
Los Angeles, Calif.

Red Leather

I went to the city an' I staid there a spell,
An' for seven long months I did pretty well;
I bought me a flivver, some jellybean clothes,
I flirted with the flappers an' I went to the shows.

I got me a job for a sharper-guy,
Up in a buildin' ten stories high;
I rounded up figures an' I roped shorthand,
An' I bulldogged checks for the boss to brand.

But one spring day as I walked down the street,
Wonderin' if cowboy life was a cheat,
I saw a saddle in a saddle shop,
An' all of a sudden my heart went *flop!*

For there was the bridle, the girt, an' the straps,
An' there was the spurs an' the rope an' the chaps;
I stood there lookin', as still as could be,
An' the longer I looked the more I could see.

I saw the plains an' I saw the West,
With a carpet of green grass over its breast;
I saw the lean herds grazin' again,
An' I felt my hand in a horse's mane.

I heard the wail of a lone coyote,
An' the silver call of a plover's note;
The old chuck wagon came into view,
An' the cook's "come get it", I heard that too.

Then it's goodby city, I'm done with you,
It's goodby figures an' flappers, too,
I'm hittin' the trail just as fast as I can,
To find me a job that was made for a man!

—WHITNEY MONTGOMERY

No—No Roars

THE NEWLY installed *yuh*-eradic: or is working fairly well; it has onl balked once. On a long novelette of cov boy action the gears froze and a be slipped, practically ruining Chapter XII But thus far we have received no con plaints from readers.

Comrade Richardson quotes an ir teresting letter from Alaska, as well.

I picked up a copy of the magazine on a recer trip, and enjoyed it uncommonly well; largely b cause it was entirely free from *yuh's*. Sanitary, s to speak. Really, it makes a noticeable difference i your atmosphere. If I have had any hand in brin ing about the change, I am proud. But I wish yo might extend your taboo to cover *yore* and *dontch* and the other variations; in fact, let our harmle little old friend the second personal pronoun stan on its own feet. I do not at all understand the cor centration of all conventional dialects on this ir offensive part of speech. It may all come from Owe Wister, who made his Virginian say *yu* throughou his English being otherwise normal. I am not con petent to criticize Wister, but I shall never unde stand why he did this; any more than I shall eve know why Thackeray elected to use *sate* in "Vanit Fair."

And I wonder if you are getting roars from reade who cannot savor western fiction without their *yuh*'.

I cannot refer to the number in question, becaus on my way home I met up with the particular foc predestined to me, who smashed "Us" up prett badly; but in it you spoke of planning a drive ove the Old Spanish Trail. Now this is a beautiful thin to do, the first time or the hundredth time; but hope you do not try to make a speed record acros Louisiana, like young Vanderbilt. It pains me t think of any intelligent person racing throug Houma, without turning up to Thibodeaux; of fail ing to loaf along the Donaldsonville-Plaquemine section; or missing the New Iberia-St. Martinvill country on the Bayou Teche; or perhaps taking look at the vanished piney-woods up around here—

"Shanghai Charlie"

"BETELNUT", his short story in the present issue of *Adventure*, we believe to be the last work in fiction of Charles Victor Fischer, for years one of the most popular authors appearing in this magazine. His name is entered on the tablet in our office. This tablet bears first the names of greatly loved *Adventure* authors who have reefed their mainsails, and taken the last long tack into the sunset. May our Shanghai Charlie meet no hurricanes or head winds!

The End of the Earth

THE FOLLOWING letter, reproduced exactly as received, strikes me as being one of the most poignant and pathetic I have ever read. It was dated April 15th, 1927—and reached the office of this magazine on *March 30th, 1928!* A postscript mentioned that mail would be leaving England, for Tristan Da Cunha, some time in December, 1927—but *that* Christmas season has gone into history. I am just wondering a little about *another* Christmas . . .

But read the letter first.

Tristan Da Cunha, April 15th, 1927.

Dear Mr. Editor,

I have received several letters from friends in America asking me to write to you about our lonely island and how we live.

The first man to settle on the island was William Glass of Kelso, Scotland. Founder of the settlement of Tristan Da Cunha which he reside 37 years, and at the time he lived on the island he was in charge of the island and was only himself and his wife on the island at the time and a few years after several ships were wrecked on the island and two or three sailors remained and helped William Glass in his potatoes fields and catching fish and they lived a very quiet life and as time went on they found it very lonely for it was only William Glass and his family but there were no other women on the island but one fine morning they were surprised to see a Vessel coming towards their little settlement and it turned out to be an American Whaler from New Bedford looking for Wright Whale for whale bone in those days was very valuable and lots of money in it and near the shores of Tristan Da Cunha islands was a great place for Wright Whales in certain months of year and they always came to Tristan Da Cunha for to get potatoes so the single men that was on the island got permission from Mr. Glass to cultivate a small plot of ground for to grow potatoes and they had a very

good crop of potatoes the first year and the same day they were digging their potatoes Mr. Glass shouted sail Ho—Sail Ho and about 30 minutes later four boats were seen rowing towards the shore. It was Captain Ham of New Bedford, Mass., U. S. A., who came to Tristan Da Cunha for to buy potatoes so the new settlers who had no wives thought it was their time for to get a wife. So they made a bargain with Captain Ham if he would bring them six women from St. Helena island they would give him 120 bushel of potatoes and signed the agreement and went back to his ship and told his mate the news and his mate said Captain we have a fair wind for St. Helena island and in 42 days he was back to Tristan Da Cunha island again and had on board six girls from St. Helena for the young men on the island of Tristan. But there was great excitement when the boat landed with the girls on board they had to draw lots who would be first so they had to send for Mr. William Glass for to settle the matter and had to go when they landed to see everything was done fair so every man got his wife and Captain Ham got his 120 bushels of potatoes the price of the six wives. For at Tristan there are some large caves and one or two of the parties lived in the caves for a few days until they had a house for on the island we have no wood for building houses we have to trust to ship wrecks for wood but after the above mention parties were all settled down they start in farming—catching fish and collecting seal skins for sale and ships begin to call at the island and they began to trade potatoes, meat, eggs, butter, milk, geese, fowls and they lived quiet comfortable life but would hear very little of the outside world for sometimes it is three or four years before we get a letter from our friends in the U. S. A. and England and sometimes over two years before we can get a chance of sending a letter for we have to trust to the vessels that pass our island for what we can get and we often have to go as far as 20 to 25 miles for a vessel that is passing our island and not in fine weather at that for we live chiefly on fish meat and potatoes for we had a failor with our potatoes crops and meat and very short at the island and for four or five months we were living on fish only and on several days we would have nothing to eat and wish I had a crust of bread or a biscuit to give my little children for I have one girl 13 months and my youngest boy three years but my other boys & girls are all young men and women. Tristan is a healthy place to live on but the living are poor no bread for five or six months and Jam coffee sugar syrup biscuits or cheese are things that are very seldom seen at Tristan and some of children up to nine or twelve years old do not know what cheese biscuits or Jam are and that will give the reader of this letter how we live for tonight while I am writing this letter and my wife are also writing to some of her friends in England we have not got nothing for our supper and what little we have got we have to save it for our five little children for children are very fond of sweets, biscuits, cheese for my wife are 43 years old and have seen only one Christmas pudding and several other things they have not seen at Tristan which I will mention in my next letter I write to you giving you more details about the island for at the present time we are having a very hard time of it very little to eat and I would be very thankful if some kind friend would help me by sending me a small parcel of clothing or groceries I would be very thankful for the same and I could do with a couple pair of boots and shoes size 9-10 for our island are a very wet climate especially in the Winter time and we have to work hard in our potatoes fields for to make a living and a very poor one at that and we are obliged to ask for help for spades are very useful and the island for working in the gardens we have a population of 150 men & women and we live chiefly on fish and wild sea birds. We have ten small boats about 16 feet long that we use for fishing and collecting wood for cook with and we have five large boats that we use for going across Nightengale Island which is about 25 miles from Tristan and anexcessiable island which is about 21 miles from Tristan and there are thousands of sea birds breed there and we go then to collec eggs in the breeding season.

Hoping to hear from you by the return post,

Sincerely, —ROBERT F. GLASS

Publication date on this present number of *Adventure* is May 15th, 1928. Of course it is too late to do anything (concertedly) about Christmas, 1928. But just suppose a gang of us felt like doing something genuine for these most lonely and poverty stricken of mortals? I know *I'd* like to, and shall. If any comrade wants to send in any sort of contribution by September 1st, the editors of *Adventure* will see to the shipping. And, allowing for the long wait between mails, packages sent from here in September ought to reach Tristan Da Cunha along about December, 1929.

I do not think that we should give money—it being of little use down there. But is there a manufacturer of spades in the house? A maker of tinned cheeses, dehydrated fruits, hard candy? A comrade who sells shoes of stout design, strawberry jam, sugar cookies? Rubber boots?

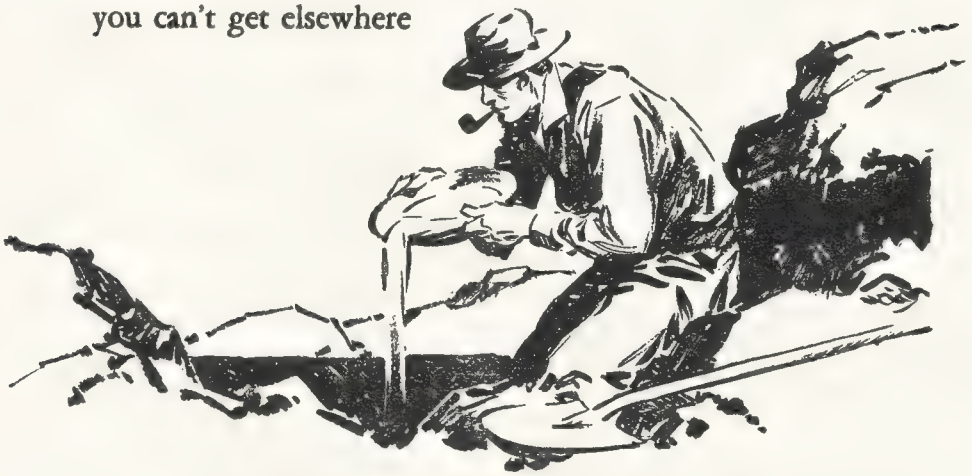
Articles should not be perishable, of course, and should be as compact in size as possible. No doubt children's clothing which has been outgrown, would be mighty acceptable.

But I leave it up to those about the fire. For myself I'd like to send one *real* Christmas to Tristan Da Cunha!—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services

you can't get elsewhere



Mounties

GRADUALLY this famous Service is being withdrawn into the Far North, where its members often act in divers capacities, from that of coroner to that of justice of the peace.

Request:—"Can you tell me whether or not there are any books printed dealing with the exploits of the Canadian Mounted Police? I mean fact—not fiction. Seems to me I have heard of a book or year-book called 'Scarlet and Gold' that is or was published in Toronto.

Also—can you tell me something regarding the present status of the force? That is, numbers, territory policed, extent of duties, organization, etc.?" —ELDON B. GREENLAND, Aberdeen, Md.

Reply, by Mr. Patrick Lee:—I think you will find what you require in "Riders of the Plains," by A. L. Haydon, or "Policing the Plains," by the Rev. H. G. McBeth. The year-book you mention is that of an organization of ex-members of the R. N. W. M. P. (as the R. C. M. P. were known before the name was changed). I think you will find that it is published in Vancouver, B. C., but it may be available in Toronto. The two books I have mentioned deal with the work and organization of the Mounted Police from the foundation of the Force in 1873 until recently, as late as 1918, and supplements are being added to bring the books up to date. You should be able to get them from Messrs. Hodder & Stoughton, booksellers, of Toronto.

The numbers of the Force vary from time to time. For instance, immediately after the World War there were 1,500 men in the Service. In 1922 the numbers were about 1,200, and now I believe they are somewhat less than that, but I am not sure. An inquiry directed to the Commissioner, at Ottawa, would give you the exact number.

In the Provinces of Canada, the R. C. M. P. enforce only Federal law, and their chief work is on the Indian reservations, in the national parks, and in the large cities where they enforce the provisions of the Opium & Narcotic Drug Act, among others.

In the North-West Territories, and in the Yukon, to which the R. C. M. Police is gradually being withdrawn, they are responsible for the enforcement of all law, and in many remote localities the officers of the R. C. M. Police act as justices of the peace, coroners, postmasters, and customs officers. In recent years a great many new posts have been established in the Far North, ranging from Bache Peninsula (only 500 miles from the Pole, on the east coast of Ellesmere Island), to Aklavik, off the mouth of the Mackenzie River.

If you are very interested in the work of the Force, I would advise you to write to the Com-

missioner, and ask him to send you the annual report, in which you will find the whole data of the year. It will cost but a few cents, and is well worth reading.

Swords

HOW TO remove tarnish. Crusaders' swords.

Request:—"Is there any possible way to brighten a sword which has been in a fire and the handle and blade tarnished? Is there a patent cleaner that would do this?

Bannerman Sons of New York do not have a very good selection of Crusaders' swords. Is there another place such as Bannerman's that specializes in these weapons or make extensive collections of them? What is the average maximum and minimum prices?"—J. F. LAYDEN, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Robert E. Gardner:—With reference to the sword which has been through the fire, I would suggest that you try the following method of cleaning: First apply a good oil (3 in 1 will suffice), then brush vigorously with a wire brush until the rust has been removed then rub down with crocus cloth.

Crusaders' swords, which are exceedingly rare, are not met with frequently. Sumner-Healy, 785 Madison Ave., New York City, at times have them on hand. At the Archduke Eugen of Austria, Sale, March, 1927, knightly swords sold from $40.00 to $150.00.

Chilean Nitrate

A GOOD hard rain would wash away millions of dollars' worth of the stuff in a short time, but by a natural providence it is deposited on a coastal plateau over which rain clouds seldom hover.

Request:—"I would like to find out about the nitrate fields of Chile. I understand that most of the commercial nitrate used in this country comes from down there. I would like to know:

What part of Chile are the nitrate fields located?
How is it mined or gathered?
What is the climate of this region?
What are the uses of nitrate?
Who operates the fields?
Whether the district is accessible by rail?
Chance for work for a white man down there?"—WM. M. SMITHSON, Panther, W. Va.

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—In order, perhaps, that I may talk intelligibly about the nitrate fields of Chile I should go into geography and topography a bit.

Chile, "the shoestring republic," is 2,627 miles long with a width varying from 100 to 248 miles. Owing to this longitudinal stretch and also to the height of the Andes at the northern end of the republic, we find certain peculiarities of climate. The rain clouds are either milked dry as they pass over the flat areas of Brazil and Argentine or are chilled so badly while passing over the high plateaus of Bolivia that they are rainless when they arrive over northern Chile.

Now and again they have cloudy days, but a mere sprinkle in twenty or thirty years is about the most that could be wished for in this portion. Specifically this desert portion, known as the desert of Atacama, comprises the four widest provinces of the republic and is, roughly speaking, five hundred by two hundred miles in extent. As narrow as Chile is, it has considerable total area. It is about equal to the combined areas of Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Holland and Switzerland. Further south there is plenty of rain. Down around the southern end there is a bit too much, as any one who has traversed the "rain forests" will testify. By cutting it into strips from north to south we can describe it in a general way as follows:

1st. Desert.
2nd. Mineral.
3rd. Agricultural.
4th. The bleak southern islands.

THE ABOVE gives us a general view of the whole of Chile and the portion the nitrate zone occupies. Further I will say that, with the exception of a slight gap at the very north in disputed country, there is a longitudinal railroad running almost from end to end of the country. There are railroads running from this main stem down to some sixty small ports. The nitrate fields may be entered through the ports of Pisagua, Junin, Caleta, Iquique and others, including the port of Antofagasta, where the railroad leaves for Bolivia. The Coast Range of mountains hugs the coast. Between this and the main range of the Andes is a rough plateau, called locally the *pampa,* and it is in the northern portion of this plateau the nitrate fields are situated.

At the extreme northern end of the nitrate zone the fields are found within fifteen miles of the coast, but further south they lie back fifty or a hundred miles. You will see it piled on the wharves ready for shipping at all the ports of the "rainless country." Also you will see more windjammers in these ports than in any other portion of the world. They are there from every corner of the globe, for this is a product that can be handled by sailing craft today.

The nitrate is found, comparatively, right on top of the ground. If it rained a good hard rain, millions of dollars' worth of it would be washed away, as it is very soluble in water. However, there isn't much chance of rain falling in sufficient quantity ever to do any harm.

The nitrate is not the very top crust of the desert. The top crust is called *churca,* and the second *costra,* the hardest to penetrate, and the third and valuable one is *caliche.* It lies from three to four

feet below the surface and is raised by sinking narrow shafts, inserting a charge of powder, replacing the earth and touching off the fuse. More recently steam shovels have come into use. The heavy dust has been a problem for this sort of handling I have heard.

The raw *caliche* contains about 20 to 75% nitrate of soda. It also contains sulphate of soda, salt, iodine, potash, magnesia and lime. The operating plants are also equipped to extract the by-products. These plants are locally known as *oficinas*. Besides the structures for housing the huge vats, boiling tanks and crushers, there are barracks for officials and laborers, clubs, administration buildings, etc. Some of these plants occupy considerable area.

After the raw *caliche* is brought in by mule carts or tramways it is crushed by powerful crushers and passed by conveyors to the boiling vats which are heated by steam pipes. Here it is dissolved. The sand and gravel settle to the bottom. The water is allowed to cool and the nitrate is precipitated in the form of rough crystals. It is sacked in jute bags for shipping and sent down to the coast. The by-products left in the vats are extracted in various ways.

THERE are hundreds of foreigners employed as officials throughout the nitrate country, thousands of native laborers and those from neighboring republics.

It is the bleakest looking country in the world. Due to no rain there is no vegetation, and even should there be moisture nothing could grow in soil of this kind. Water is distilled at the ports from sea water brought from other parts in water-barges, or, recently, piped down from the melting snows of the Andes. All food has to be imported. There is absolutely nothing raised. A crow would have to carry his rations along with him. There is nothing even for reptiles and insects to eat.

Yet from this bleak place the valuable nitrate comes that makes two grains of corn sprout where only one sprouted before, which increases the yield of wheat twofold on any sort of land. Made into powder this same nitrate helped decimate Europe during the world war. The powder that is used for blowing it from the earth is made from it also. It is also used for making nitric acid and nitroglycerine.

The fields are operated by Chileans, Americans, English and French companies. The land is government owned and a price is fixed (10 cents for 220 pounds) as a government royalty. There is also an additional export tax.

Pugilist

WHEN mighty John L. tabooed a weakness.

Request:—"Please tell me the name of the man who sponsored John L. Sullivan in his first prize-fight? Also what became of the man or his family? Did John L. Sullivan drink intoxicating liquor to excess; in other words what did he die of? (I heard it was too much drink.)"—B. PITT, Santa Cruz, Calf.

Reply, by Mr. James P. Dawson:—Jim Keenan of Boston was the man who discovered John L. Sullivan, although the discovery is credited variously to Tom Hurley and Billy Madden. It was Madden who was associated with Sullivan at the height of John L.'s career. Exhaustive inquiry fails to disclose any trace of Keenan or his family.

John L. drank intoxicating liquor, and to excess, until 1904 or 1905, when, while in Terre Haute, Ind., he made the declaration, "If I take another drink I hope I choke, so help me God." This was uttered while John L. was in a saloon, but from that day to his death liquor never touched his lips. He died of a heart attack, Feb. 2, 1918.

Lumber Camps

LOGGING in the redwood country.

Request:—"I am interested in lumber camp work, but have never done anything like that before; therefore I am asking you for a little advice. What is the best State to try my luck—Oregon, California or Washington? What is the best time of year to try my luck? Is not lumber camp work a healthful occupation?"—ALTON EVANS, Crane, Texas.

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—In my opinion the best logging section on the coast is that in the northwestern part of California, among the redwoods, and this is why: They log redwood trees all the year round, while pine, fir and spruce are not logged after snow falls deeply. They never have snow in the redwood forests so it is not so cold. Then California law compels much better conditions in logging camps. I have lived in a California camp among the redwood trees and know how they are run: separate cabins for each four men, plenty of light and air, a good stove, clean beds—not the bunks seen elsewhere. The bed I slept in was excellent.

The grub is fine and well cooked, the pay is good. I do not know what they pay green hands now, but during the war they paid $3.75 a day while the men learned their duties. Afterward from $4.50 to $6.50.

Taking into consideration the weather conditions in mountains where they cut most of the pine, fir and spruce, and the harder work to do in getting out a harvest of logs, I vote for the redwoods emphatically and continuously. Logging is a healthful occupation.

Go to Eureka, Scotia, Arcata, Samoa on Humboldt Bay, Humboldt County, California. Scotia is south of the bay some miles. Plenty of companies up there who are always needing men.

For Shooters

A NATIONAL organization sponsored by the Government and offering attractive privileges to members.

Request:—"Would like to know if you can give me any information regarding the National Rifle Association."—CECIL E. FLETCHER, Plush, Oregon.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The National Rifle Association is an organization sponsored by the Government, but not requiring any military duty or anything else, save good citizenship.

By joining, you are privileged to use Government ranges, and to purchase at very attractive prices, Government arms and ammunition for target shooting. Some articles of private manufacture are also sold very reasonably to shooters. I have purchased several rifles, some ammunition and three revolvers through this organization, myself. I may add that I am a member, and join annually, having done so for many years past.

Dip Compass

A MAGNETIC needle used to locate deposits of iron ore.

Request:—"I have been thinking of buying a machine that is supposed to locate iron under ground. Is there such a machine that will really do that?

I have received advertisements from a few companies that make machines and claim that they will do the work. I know there are machines made that will locate coal, for I have seen one in operation and it was successful; I suppose they work on the same principal as a machine that is supposed to locate iron.

Please tell me all you can about this machine and if you know of any other way of locating iron? I would be very much obliged to know."—STANLEY M. ROSENBERGER, Myersdale, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The apparatus you refer to (for locating concealed deposits of iron) is the dip compass, or dip needle. It is merely a magnetic needle which swings in a vertical plane, and is used to locate bodies of iron ore. Their cost is not great, but you should at least know a bit of trigonometry to obtain accurate results from their use. The result depends upon attraction of needle by the ore.

The method of locating iron deposits with the dip compass is roughly as follows: Various set-ups of the dip compass are made in the area supposed to be underlaid by such ore, and the angles made by the needle with both horizon and meridian are noted. Later, by platting all these angles—if a body of iron ore exists—they will be found to outline the approximate position of the ore body, since the needle will have been pulled more from the horizontal the nearer you have approached to a position vertically above the ore.

The needle can not however register values, and only approximate depths. In order to obtain accurate data test pits, or borings, must be made.

The above are the only machines, so-called, which you could hope to operate. There are certain apparatus of highly scientific nature and depending for results upon intricate computations having to do with the motion of the earth, or with deviations or distortions of an electromagnetic field caused by a conducting sphere, and the results from which are platted in a series of curves. No one but a scientist and trained mathematician can comprehend or use such.

The divining rod, or witch-stick, is a fake.

Sound

AN INTERESTING exposition of the meaning of "loudness". The function of sounding boards.

Request:—"A friend of mine says that the loudest continuous sound is produced by the "beat". It appears that a beat is produced by two different sounds of a slightly different frequency. However the greater the difference in frequency up to a certain point, the louder the production from the beat will be.

I have tried several references in order to determine if the statement of my friend was correct concerning the beat, but the facilities seem to be limited concerning sound. I am inclined to doubt that the "beat" does produce the loudest sound.

Now I would like to know:

1. If there are not three or four or more sounds of a slightly different frequency, which will reinforce one another (even greater than the beat) and yet produce a louder sound to the ear without an apparent break.

2. The combinations that will produce the loudest sound; their frequencies (in relation to one another).

3. If there will be a tendency towards musical tones."—L. B. KENT, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Reply, by Mr. Donald McNicol:—1. I see no reason why with given amplitude the "beat" note should be louder than a fundamental. The beat note is that which appears when two different frequencies are imposed on the system; the beat being a note of a frequency which is the difference numerically between the two impressed frequencies.

2. "Loudness" is a matter of amplitude of the swing. Loudness depends upon the energy of the initial disturbance. Presumably you are familiar with the method of increasing loudness by use of a megaphone. In the string instruments with sounding boards such as the violin, the amplitude of the board in vibration is very much smaller than that of the string, but the board's area of contact with the air is very much greater than that of the string. Here you have the factors of "surface" and "amplitude". The vibration of the board added to that of the string makes the sound louder. Of

course, a swelling and diminishing of sound occurs when the waves from vibrating bodies of slightly different frequencies combine.

3. The combination of fundamental with overtones and harmonics determines the "quality" of the sound.

Philippine Scouts

ONE FILIPINO graduate of the Military Academy is commissioned in this old Islands organization each year. Most of the officers, however, are Americans detailed from the regular Army.

Request:—"What is the present organization of the Philippine Scouts?

1. Are the commissioned officers largely Filipino or American?

2. Are the officers appointed from civil life, from selected non-commissioned officers, or transferred from other regiments?

3. Are there many Filipino graduates of the United States Military Academy in the Service at present?"—HARRY M. GRAY, San Fernando, Cal.

Reply, by Lieut. Glen R. Townsend:—Since the passage of the amendments to the National Defense Act in 1920 the Philippine Scouts have been virtually a part of the Regular Army and their organization follows the same tables as units of the regular service. Philippine Scouts at present compose two regiments of infantry, one of cavalry, one of field artillery (mountain) a battalion of engineers, detachments of coast artillery, field signal and other staff troops. These are all stationed in the Islands.

The commissioned officers are mostly Americans, but there are some Filipinos. The old Scout officers who remained in the service and the Filipinos serve only with the Scouts. The Scout units are chiefly officered, however, by commissioned personnel of the regular Army who are detailed for duty with the Scout troops in the same manner as with units of the regular Army. The law provides for one Filipino member of each class at the Military Academy who, upon graduation, is commissioned in the Scouts.

Insect Dope

FORTUNATELY the black fly is not one of the common pests that harass the city dweller, but few of us are immune to the onslaught of its blood brother, the mosquito, and the following preparation has been found effective for both.

Request:—"Having seen your name in *Ask Adventure* as an authority on Northern Quebec, I imagined you must have had a lot of experience with black flies and mosquitoes. I wonder if it would be asking too much to ask you if you would advise me what dope you have found to be the most successful. I suppose this question does not properly come under your department, but pheraps you will be good enough to give me the benfiet of your experience."—C. P. HOWARD, Lachine, Que.

Reply, by Mr. S. E. Sangster:—There is a preparation put up and sold by a concern in Quebec City—its name I can not at the moment give you—but I believe they sell this under the name of "Fly Terror". It is a white liquid, containing among other ingredients, camphor. I have found it rather effective.

A preparation I have had made up and used myself in the Height of Land Region for years, which, being a muskeg country, is about the worst mosquito and black fly territory in Canada, contains as the body olive oil, with oil of citronella and pennyroyal oil, proportioned about as follows: 10 oz. olive, 1 oz. citronella and ½ oz. pennyroyal, I think. This was an old prescription given me fifteen years ago by a Labrador fisherman and it is about the most effective I've ever used; personally I prefer the olive oil as a body rather than tar.

As a matter of fact, mosquitoes seem to grow to like any preparation. Salt fat of fat pork, rubbed on the skin, is effective too. A smoke smudge burning and smoldering, throwing a veritable smoke screen, as it were, is usually my favorite protection in camp.

"With All Four Barrels—"

TO THOSE of us who have never seen one, this curious, heavy bore weapon suggests something right formidable to behold.

Request:—"I have in my collection a four-barreled pistol, hammerless, double action, ejector, by Charles Lancaster, London, England, Cal. .476. It is a beautiful piece of workmanship in new condition.

I would like to find out where I can get ammunition for it on this side of the water. The .45 Colt is too small, or so it seems to me as the bullet fits very loosely in muzzle of pistol for accurate shooting. I am anxious to try it out, so thought perhaps you might be able to give me some information on the subject."—R. H. CHIPMAN, St. Johns, N. B., Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—I have handled the four-barreled pistol you describe, although as no ammunition was available, had no opportunity to fire it.

I have been informed that they were made up, as were the double-barreled ones of heavy bore, for Frontier use, and in the Sudan, during the latter part of the last century. Our New Service Colt was formerly made for this same .476 load, I recall, although I never saw one of them.

I believe your best chance is to communicate with the following firm, who will give you the address of their Canadian agents who can supply you with the .476 ammunition: Eley Bros., Ltd., London, England.

Lunch Wagons

AN EDITORIAL writer on the New York *World* recently got to musing in print about the genealogy of the lunch wagon. He appealed to his readers in the open forum to relieve him in this sad perplexity; and of the many replies received, we think the following is exceptionally good. We are therefore taking the liberty of reprinting, especially since in subject matter it bears closely on Henry Herbert Knibbs' poem that appears on another page in this issue.

LUNCH WAGONS HAD WHEELS

To the Editor of the World:

Can you ask in good faith the question: Did lunch wagons once have wheels? Is it possible that men have grown old enough to be editorial writers who were born since the lunch wagon lost its wheels, as mankind has grown up since the auk lost the use of its wings and the kangaroo lost his front legs by walking on his tail?

The origin of the lunch wagon was probably the chuck wagon of cattle-herding days. Chuck is a development of the word chew. In the period when all plainsmen and soldiers lived in wagons the cook became habituated to the chuck wagon.

As the migratory life began to crystallize around cattle towns at rail heads such as Abilene, Hays, and in a lesser sense at Kansas City, the saloon was the first stationary institution. Chuck or lunch was still on wheels. On the outskirts of town the cook prepared his beef stew and hard-tack or chilli con carne. By nightfall his savory mess was ready.

But no longer could he shout: "Come and get it."

He had to drive down to Main Street to be in calling distance of the former cowboys. They were in the saloons. He parked his chuck wagon in front of the drink parlors and for the evening food and drink, in a country of magnificent distances, had come within elbow-reach again. Wheels did it.

So the nightly lunch wagons became a custom of urbanized Westerners. Long after Kansas City was a considerable metropolis the "dog" wagons dispensing hot dogs, pigs' feet sandwiches (called "Trilby" sandwiches) and chilli con carne were a welcome feature on the streets at night. Teamsters hauled them to their curb docking-places after the 6 o'clock rush was over and hauled them away before the morning traffic came on.

These wheels were for transport and the customers ate standing, while the cook and his food occupied the entire cart. Gradually they became bigger, with counter and stools inside.

Two new developments put them off the main streets of the cities: The closing of the saloons, which taught men to eat in secret the same way they drank; the automobile, which made traffic too thick for lunch wagons.

It is an indication that the American race has decided to settle here and stay. Beds are no longer on roller castors; they are built in. Now we have taken the wheels off of our grub. We are preparing to stay here awhile, as the Sumerians stayed in the Babylonian Valley. C. L. EDSON.

New York, April 3.

Forest Fires

THE THREE types as classified by the Federal Forest Service.

Request:—"What are the three kinds of fire common in forests?"—FLOYD W. BURNS, Youngstown, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Ernest W. Shaw:—The Federa Forest Service has roughly classified forest fires as falling within three types or classes—ground, surface and top fires. The names given are almost self-explanatory. A top fire is that which has reached such intensity as to spread from the ground surface to the tops and is then running in the tops as well as on the ground. A surface fire is just what the word means, merely the burning of surface trash and litter without running up the trees to the tops. This usually is the kind of fire encountered in open stands where the underbrush is light or very green and not easily burned. Ground fires are those which run under the surface of the ground either in the bottom layers of needle duff which is very deep on the ground, or in dead roots or dry peet swamp or similar places.

Hounds

WHAT it takes to make a killer.

Request:—"I am writing to find your opinion on the best way to train a wolfhound to catch and kill a coyote. I had two of them that worked together, one of which was a killer, but they got old and did not care to work. Since then I can not teach others to get a hold on a coyote. I never saw any kind of dogs, except hounds, that could catch and kill a coyote."—FRED SMITH, Arlington, Ore.

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thomson:—It is very difficult to get a wolfhound to take hold of a coyote unless its natural instincts encourage it to do so, and it has the guts to perform the work. Sometimes by running them with dogs that are killers, they take to it themselves. On other occasions, by urging them on a coyote in a pen, it brings on the desire. But I am a good deal like you—I believe that if it is not natural with the dog, it is pretty hard to make it a killer.

The next issue of ADVENTURE

Two Fine Novelettes

El Caballero

By Walt Coburn

Few men know the old West as well as Walt Coburn; none write better stories about it. This new story of the wildest days of early Tombstone and a cocky young buckaroo of magnificent courage is, we feel, one of his best.

The Aristocrat

By Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson

While *Contreras*, Mexican bandit and ruthless murderer, played fast and loose among the Border towns, *Captain Tinker*, temporary officer with the American cavalry contingent, spent his time looking impeccable and impressing his subordinates that he was an aristocrat. Until *Contreras* attacked and *Lieutenant Davies*, veteran of the Border, took a hand.

The Old Warhorse

By James Stevens

Not since "The Bullpuncher" have we had the pleasure of announcing such a stirring tale of the North Pacific timber country. A story of father and son: Old Johnny McCann, now too tired to stand the fierce grind of the lumber mills, but still strong with the fire of battle, and determined not to give place to a younger man—unless it be wayward, lazy, handsome, strapping young Johnny.

And—*Other Good Stories*

Part Two, IN THE YEAR 2000, a novel of the Orinoco Jungle, by ARTHUR O. FRIEL; KIWI, the non-flying war bird, by RAOUL F. WHITFIELD; BOUND SOUTH, a detective on the high seas, by CAPTAIN DINGLE; THE VANISHING VANDAL, a polished crime for a subtle sheriff, by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON; HANK'S OTHER PARDNER, letters of a wandering partner, by ALAN LEMAY; BLACK BOOTY, a mystery of the Canadian fur country, by BERNARD J. FARMER; SAILORS ALL, a windjammer mate on a floating palace, by STANLEY WALKER.